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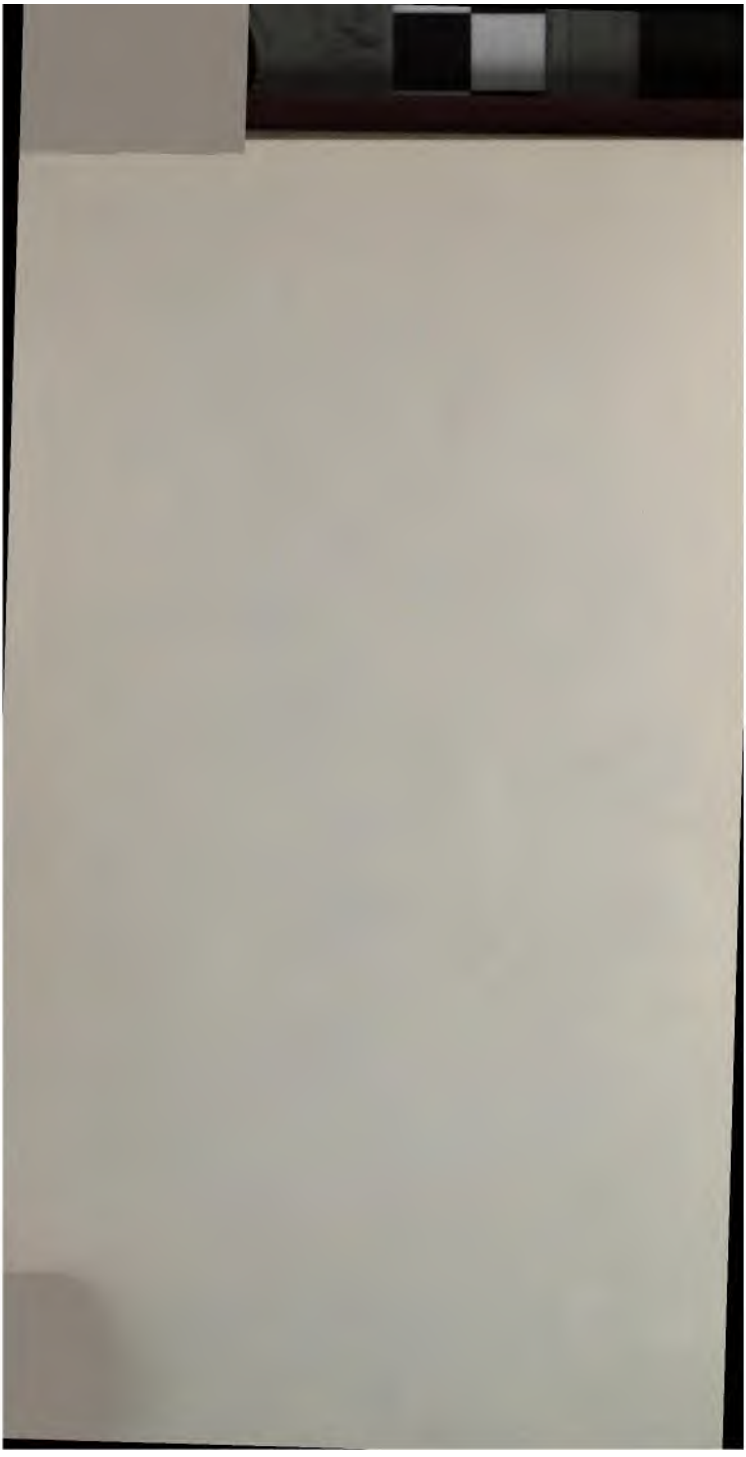


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STUDIES

IN

ENGLISH LITERATURE.



STUDIES

IN

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

JOHN DENNIS.

LONDON:
EDWARD STANFORD, 55, CHARING CROSS, S.W.
1876.

(104)



PREFACE.

THE chapters in this volume are to some extent reprints; but several of them are considerably enlarged, and some are so changed in substance and form as to present an original aspect. The groundwork of the essay on Pope, republished by the courtesy of Messrs. Longmans, is to be found in *Fraser's Magazine;* but the author has also made use, with the permission of the proprietors, of several papers on the same subject printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and in the *Athenæum*. Thanks are due to the editors of the *Spectator*, for authority to insert the Wesley article; and to Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co., for the use of the remaining essays. The transformation of some of these essays, and especially of the three papers on English poetry, is, however, so great that the author feels some diffidence in presenting them as reprints from the *Cornhill*.

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STUDIES

IN

ENGLISH LITERATURE.

ALEXANDER POPE.

POPE is the principal literary figure of a great literary age. In spite of many competitors and poetical rivals, his supremacy as the first poet of his century is universally acknowledged. And the honour he received from contemporaries is in a measure still considered to be his due. Pope died in 1744, and the century and a quarter that has elapsed since his death has been marked by stupendous changes, not alone in the political world, but also in the world of literature. Between the men of Queen Anne's age and the men of the Victorian era it might seem that there was little in common beyond the passions and aspirations which belong to human nature and are alike in all ages. We stand, as it



were, in a new world; with higher aims perhaps, certainly with stronger feelings; with wider knowledge, and urged on by an intellectual impetus and excitement of which the earlier period knew little.

The poetical revolution effected at the beginning of this century, with its marvellous wealth of thought, its exquisite music, its varied play of imagination, its fine perception of natural beauty, to which may be added, its contempt for order, threatened by its weakness as well as by its strength to overturn the sovereignty of Pope. Old barriers were broken down, old laws despised, liberty in things poetical—which too often meant extravagance and license—was proclaimed upon the housetops, and so powerful was the revulsion from what has been absurdly called the classic school of poetry, that critics with some reputation to lose did not hesitate in announcing their conviction that Pope was no poet.

The heresy spread with considerable rapidity. Lord Byron, despite his intense admiration of Pope, whom, with exaggerated emphasis, he styled "the great moral poet of all times, of all climes, of all feelings, and of all stages of existence," adding that "a thousand years will roll away before such another

can be hoped for in our literature," helped, although unwittingly, to subvert the authority of his master. Scott, great in so many ways, and as generous as he was great, carried with him the taste of the nation into a region Pope had never entered, and Wordsworth, far less popular than either, but destined as a poet to exert a wider influence, was not satisfied in thinking lightly of poetry with which he had no sympathy, but vigorously attacked the poet. That such a man should entertain a comparatively mean opinion of Pope is not surprising. Wordsworth had no wit, and wit is the predominant element in Pope. Wordsworth deals with the verities of life, Pope with the conventional moralities of society; Wordsworth lived in the eye of nature, Pope in the eye of men; Wordsworth was a greater poet than artist, Pope, a consummate artist, seldom rises to a place in the first rank of poets; Wordsworth, self-contained and self-sufficient, maintained his poetical faith heedless of opposition; Pope had no faith other than that accepted by his age. It is not difficult to understand how the zeal of converts to the new creed should have led them to treat Pope with scorn, nor why some of the leading advocates of a new order in poetry were unable to appreciate his genius. Thus Southey told Rogers that he had read Spenser through



about thirty times, and that he could not read Pope through once. If Southey, instead of neglecting Pope, had studied him with the care he deserves, it might have proved of essential service to him as a poet. His poetry, which he believed would crown his name with imperishable glory, notwithstanding many high qualities, is already neglected, or known only to a few omnivorous readers, and we remember Southey chiefly as a prose writer. Pope, despised for a time, and as Dr. Chalmers observed, "almost never heard of," is once more placed by universal consent amongst the peers of literature. The House of Fame, said Swift, "is so full, that there is no room for above one or two at most, in an age, through the whole world." But, crowded though the House may be, there can be little doubt that these friends and incomparable satirists will retain a place in it.

In spite, then, of the influences at work during the earlier years of this century tending to lessen the poetical fame of Pope, his reputation has grown, and is still growing. Fresh knowledge has been gained, new editions of his works published, new biographies written, and some of the ablest writers and critics of our time have declared, in no coldly measured language, their unshaken fealty to this illustrious poet. St. Beuve has done this, so has Mr. Lowell,

so* has Mr. Ruskin, who, in his Lectures on Art, declares his conviction that Pope is one of the most accomplished artists in literature, and adds—

"Putting Shakespeare aside, as rather the world's than ours, I hold Pope to be the most perfect representative we have since Chaucer of the true English mind, and I think the 'Dunciad' is the most absolutely chiselled and monumental work 'exacted' in our country. You will find as you study Pope that he has expressed for you in the strictest language and within the briefest limits, every law of art, of criticism, of economy, of policy, and finally of a benevolence, humble, rational, and resigned, contented with its allotted share of life, and trusting the problem of its salvation to Him in whose hands lies that of the universe."

Mr. Ruskin's criticism may be open to discussion, but his generous praise of Pope is one proof among many, almost equally significant, that our great satirist, notwithstanding all his faults and poetical shortcomings, has not lost his savour with those who are best qualified to estimate his genius. In literature, as in theology, the virtues of toleration and comprehension are better understood now-a-days than in any former period. We do not hate a man, or hold him in contempt, because he differs from us in politics or creed. The warmest enthusiast for Spenser, Keats, and Shelley has but a narrow judgment of poetry if he cannot also admire the sonorous verse of Dryden, or the consummate



art—an art which in itself is genius—which gives vitality to every line of Pope. As well might the ardent mountaineer despise the varied beauties of wood and pasture, of rural homestead, or well-kept flower-garden, or the artist who loves the sea turn his back with contempt upon lake and river. It is a mere truism to say that Pope is not one of the greatest of our poets. There are heights to which he could not soar, and depths he was unable to fathom. He was not "of imagination all compact," he was not even "Fancy's child" in the sense in which Milton applied that epithet to Shakespeare. Beside the two great names we have mentioned, his name sounds comparatively small; but in the extensive region of poetry there is as much room for a Pope as for a Wordsworth, and the lover of literature will find in his pages a wonderful fascination, a charm that is unique, and that compels him to turn to them again and again, not indeed for solace, not perhaps for wisdom, but for what, according to Lord Bacon, is one of the ends, although a subordinate end, of poetry, "delectation."

Mr. Connington, whose premature death all lovers of literature must deplore, said, with perfect truth, that to form an independent judgment on all the discussions to which Pope's biography has given rise would require a special study, not of months, but



of years, and he remarked, with equal justice, that "there is probably no English author whose life can be compared with Pope's, as a succession of petty secrets and third-rate problems." All this is undeniable. The late Mr. Dilke, and Mr. Elwin following in his wake, have managed, by indomitable energy and patience, to solve some of these problems. Others remain, upon which opinion is divided, and it may be doubted whether the labour bestowed upon them would not be thrown away. At all events, it is ungrateful labour, and it seems hard, after receiving so much pleasure from the poet, to subject the man to our critical scalpel, and to lay bare whatever we can find in him that was foolish or ignoble. The task may be necessary, and on this point something will be said hereafter; but it is unquestionably painful. Putting aside these problems, however, it may be remarked that we know more about Pope than about any of his contemporaries, and we cannot understand Mrs. Oliphant's meaning in likening Pope's history to a "barren tale, filled from beginning to end with shadows instead of realities."* From the day when the precocious boy "lisped in numbers," until the day when the famous poet was laid to rest with the parents whom he loved, Pope's career lies

* 'Historical Sketches of the Reign of George II.,' vol. i. p. 302. W. Blackwood and Sons.

open before us. He lived all his life through in a glass house, and from the anecdotes of Spence, from the poet's letters, disingenuous as they too often are, from the voluminous correspondence of his contemporaries, and from the quarrels which served to keep men of letters alive in the eighteenth century, we can gather up almost all that is worth knowing about him.

There can be no doubt Pope's biography still remains to be written. Ayre's memoir abounds with crude inventions. Owen Ruffhead compiled his work from original manuscripts, and has preserved a few portant biographical facts; but of the 552 pages which form the volume we are within bounds in saying that 400 are wholly useless, being devoted to extracts from the poetry, declamatory criticism, and remarks on Warton's essay. Let no one read the book who will not be content to find a few grains of wheat amidst a bushel of chaff. Of Dr. Johnson's Life, which is in some respects a masterly production, the main interest is critical rather than biographical. The Rev. Mr. Bowles, "a pretty poet" and an amiable man, but garrulous, undignified, and dyspeptic, has injured Pope by misrepresentations and perverse suspicions, and has lowered his own reputation by a fruitless controversy. There



is perhaps some worth in Roscoe's memoir, though none in his criticism, and the dulness of the book is intolerable. A biography that nobody can read might as well not have been written. Mr. Ward's compact memoir, prefixed to the "Globe" edition of the poet's works, has been carefully and judiciously compiled. The writer has a sound knowledge of his subject, and his critical sagacity is rarely at fault. By far the most readable life of Pope which we possess at present is that of Mr. Carruthers. For general readers it leaves little to be desired, but students of Pope will probably agree with us that it is scarcely on a scale commensurate with the subject, and that, to quote the modest language of the writer, it "can be considered only as a contribution towards the history of Pope and his times." What Mr. Elwin's promised biography may prove we can of course only conjecture. For more than twenty years he has been collecting materials for his *magnum opus*, the works and biography of Pope. Probably no one living has so minute and exhaustive a knowledge of the subject, but it is to be feared, if we may judge from the five volumes of the Works already published, that the long labour has wearied, even disgusted him, and that, notwithstanding his fine taste, consummate ability, and entire command of his



materials, he will be unable to judge of Pope with the generosity and sympathy which are as essential in literature as in life. As far as we have followed Mr. Elwin at present, he is the severest of Pope's critics. Not a blemish escapes his eye. He notes every grammatical inaccuracy, every unmetrical line, every unsound opinion, every borrowed thought, and so persistent is his opposition that we can but marvel he should have devoted the study of years to a poet whose character he despises, and for whose finest poetry he shows, at best, a carefully-measured approbation.

Pope cannot be said to have started favourably in the race of life. He was deformed and he was sickly; but, thanks to the tender assiduities of his mother and his nurse, the feeble boy was reared in safety, and began soon to give proof that what Nature had denied in one direction she had bestowed lavishly in another. The little "nightingale," as he was called—for his voice was as sweet in childhood as his eyes were remarkable for beauty in after years—was a poet almost from the cradle, and it is interesting to read of the young genius, then considerably under twelve, paying a visit to Will's Coffee-house in order to see, if but for a moment, his poetical predecessor, John Dryden.

"*Virgilium tantum vidi*," he writes in a letter to Wycherley; and adds, "Had I been born early enough, I must have known and loved him." The early life of the poet is associated with Windsor Forest, and there was once dedicated to his memory a famous beech-tree, which has since perished in a storm. There, he tells us, he studied as constantly as he could for some years, and it speaks well for the boy's determination that at fifteen he should have gone alone to London to learn French and Italian. His half-sister, Mrs. Rackett, says, "I think my brother, when he was young, read more books than any man in the world." This is the exaggeration of a woman, proud of Pope's reputation; but that he did study at Binfield, as Milton studied at Horton, is, we think, evident, from the prescription of Dr. Radcliffe, that the young man was to study less, and to ride on horseback every day.*

* It would be curious to collect some of the contradictory opinions with regard to Pope asserted frequently as if they bore the authority of facts. He has been called the most modest and the most laborious of our poets, and he has been called the most lazy. The 'Quarterly Review' gives him credit for an intense eagerness after knowledge; De Quincey dwells upon his luxurious indolence, and intimates that reading so desultory as his cannot be called study; Mrs. Oliphant considers—and she is safe in making the observation—that she cannot tell whether he would have made a greater poet if he had tossed his books aside, renounced his "unintermitting study," and lived more under the eye of nature. "His time," says



Before the youth was eighteen he associated with men of letters, and won more praise than at that period he merited. Anyone who reads the 'Pastorals' in our day, a feat which Mrs. Oliphant declares herself unable to accomplish, will marvel how it came to pass that these poems attracted the attention of men like Congreve and Lord Somers. Pope was appreciated from the first, and had not, like some poets, to struggle through a long period of neglect. Before he was twenty he had won the friendship of Wycherley; before he was twenty-four he was praised by Addison in the 'Spectator,' and gained the friendship, which was not destined to be permanent, of that great literary leader. A year later, he was introduced to Swift, and through Swift to the most conspicuous statesmen of the age. This popularity had its

Dr. Johnson, "was wholly spent in reading and writing;" and he observes that "he improved the benefits of nature by incessant and unwearied diligence." Again he adds in a genuine bit of Johnsonese: "He was one of the few whose labour is their pleasure; he was never elevated to negligence, nor wearied to impatience; he never passed a fault unamended by indifference nor quitted it by despair. He laboured his works first, to gain reputation, and afterwards to keep it." We may add that, considering what Pope accomplished in a life which was one "long disease," it is impossible to doubt that he possessed the power of work as well as the creative faculty. In truth, a man of real genius who is incapable of steady application is a comparatively rare phenomenon.



drawbacks, for even ministers of state were accustomed in those days to frequent taverns and to drink hard. Pope tried this life for awhile, but it proved too much for him, as one of his earliest and best friends foretold. "I beg of you earnestly," writes Sir William Trumbull, "to get out of all tavern company, and fly away *tanquam ex incendio.* What a misery is it for you to be destroyed by the foolish kindness (it is all one whether real or pretended) of those who are able to bear the poison of bad wine and to engage you in so unequal a combat!"

Pope's first friendship for

"The fair-haired Martha and Teresa brown"

dates about this period, or a little earlier, and this friendship, to which we shall refer elsewhere, influenced his whole life. The poet's letters, Mr. Carruthers informs us, are still preserved at Maple-durham, and the mansion in which the young ladies welcomed their poetical adorer "continues in the most perfect state, with its fine avenue of elms and spacious lawn, and forms one of our best specimens of Elizabethan architecture unspoiled by innovation." It is only ten miles from Binfield, and Pope, who, notwithstanding his weakness, was in early life



a good horseman,* would reck little of the distance which separated him from his lady-loves. To both of them, until a quarrel, obscure to his biographers, parted him from Teresa, the poet wrote with a gallantry that was tolerated and indeed expected in that age, but which sounds ridiculous in ours. That Pope ever had a genuine love affair seems unlikely, but he gained, no doubt, several female admirers, women who liked to chat with him, perhaps to flirt with him, as the first poet of the day; women who could forgive his satires against the sex, in consideration of his preference for themselves.

To Sir William Trumbull, Pope was indebted for the suggestion that he should translate the 'Iliad.' It was a grand achievement, if not a successful translation, and we may say of it what Goldsmith said of his incomparable fiction: "There are a hundred faults in this thing, and a hundred things might be said to prove them beauties, but it is needless." About the time that he commenced it, Pope wrote: "I have the greatest proof in nature of the amusing power of poetry, for it takes me up so entirely that

* It was otherwise when he grew older, if we are to accept literally the words addressed by Swift to Pope in 1730: "I can walk eight or ten miles a day and ride thirty Irish ones. You cannot ride a mile nor walk two."

I scarcely see what is passing under my nose, and hear nothing that is said about me." This passage may remind the reader of a similar remark by Cowper, when engaged upon the same work. "I am the busiest man," he wrote, "that ever lived sequestered as I do, and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity."

The translation of the 'Iliad' brought the poet fame, and 5000*l.* to boot. The first four books were published in 1715, the last volume appeared in 1720. Then followed the 'Odyssey,' which occupied Pope and his assistants about two years. The translation brought in between 3000*l.* and 4000*l.*, out of which Pope had to pay Fenton and Broome.

The correspondence between Pope and his coadjutors, consisting of more than one hundred letters, may be read in Mr. Elwin's edition. The picture it presents is not agreeable. Dr. Johnson, in his Life of Broome, observes that Warburton thought Pope had lied in his postscript to the 'Odyssey' as to the services rendered by his assistants. From Bennet Langton, through Spence, Johnson afterwards ascertained the number of books undertaken by Fenton and Broome, and considered that they were shabbily paid for their labour. The



correspondence now printed tells the whole story, and proves that Pope, who could at all times "equivocate pretty genteelly," did in the present instance *lie*, as his friend Warburton suggested. "I fear," writes Broome to Fenton, "Mr. Pope will not give us our due share of honour. He is a Cæsar in poetry, and will bear no equal." This fear was justified; Pope grudged his assistants the praise to which they were entitled. He paid them meanly, and treated them more meanly still. Broome was especially indignant. He called Pope "wicked and ungrateful," declared that he was no master of Greek, and added pompously, "I will dismiss him with the sullen silence of Ajax, but will leave such memorials behind me when I die that posterity shall be acquainted with his history." Yet long before he thus wrote Broome had "parted with the right to complain," and had himself acted a base part towards Fenton, for whom he professed the warmest friendship. At Pope's suggestion he had appended a note to the 'Odyssey,' in which he stated, as if with the concurrence of his friend, that the merit of the work was due to Pope's daily revisal and correction, declaring, which was equally false, "our mutual satisfaction in Mr. Pope's acceptance of our best endeavours." Nor was this all, Broome "lied," to use the expressive

phraseology of the period, with regard to the amount of work the two assistants had done, crediting Pope with five books he had himself translated, and with two translated by Fenton. No wonder that Fenton was indignant, and termed this, "a license that deserves a worse epithet than I have it in my nature to give it." It seems strange that he did not publicly make known the facts of the case, and so put both Pope and Broome to shame; but he was a man of the easiest disposition. "The lazy Mr. Fenton," is Broome's description of him to Pope, and he adds:

"I will tell you a true story: when he was with me at Stursston he often fished; this gave him an opportunity of sitting still and being silent; but he left it off because the fish bit. He could not bear the fatigue of pulling up the rod and baiting the hook."

Soon after the publication of the first volume of the 'Iliad' Pope had removed with his parents to Chiswick, and here his father died in 1717, loved and reverenced by his son, who has left an affectionate tribute to his memory:

"Stranger to civil and religious rage
The good man walked innocuous through his age;
No courts he saw, no suits would ever try,
Nor dared an oath, nor hazarded a lie.
Unlearned, he knew no schoolman's subtle art,
No language but the language of the heart.

By nature honest, by experience wise,
Healthy by temperance and by exercise;
His life, though long, to sickness past unknown,
His death was instant, and without a groan.
Oh grant me thus to live, and thus to die!
Who sprung from kings shall know less joy than I."

A few months after this loss, which he deplored with sincere affection, the poet bought a small estate at Twickenham, which is as closely associated with Pope as Rydal Mount is with Wordsworth, or Abbotsford with Scott. The serene happiness which filled the days of Wordsworth, the hearty, wholesome, out-of-door life led by Scott before his great trial came upon him, were altogether unknown to Pope. The breath of the mountains was a delight unfelt by him, and so also was the splendid physical and mental health which these two illustrious men enjoyed. His love of nature must have been feeble, for it yielded no fruit in poetry, and his intellect, in spite of assumed contempt, was influenced in a far higher degree by Grub Street critics, and by rivals who envied his genius even more than they admired it. The record of Pope's life, from 1718 to 1744, when he passed away from men, is a record of strong friendships on one side, and of bitter hatreds (how bitter let the 'Dunciad' declare) upon the other. Moreover,



it was during this period of high reputation that he indulged in many of those artifices which are the perplexity of his biographers. How much that we deplore in his life was due to constitutional infirmity it is impossible to say, but M. Sainte-Beuve probably hits the truth when he says:

"L'histoire naturelle de Pope est bien simple; les délicats, a-t-on dit, sont malheureux, et lui il était deux fois délicat, délicat d'esprit, délicat et infirme de corps; il était deux fois irritable." *

This irritability of temperament, and the consciousness of physical infirmities, may account for one striking characteristic of his verse. The poetry of Pope is emphatically poetry for men. Few women appreciate his genius; no woman that we know of has ever written of him impartially. The reason is obvious. The poet's "false and scandalous charges against the sex," as Miss Mitford terms them, are likely to alienate all good women. He is the only English poet of high mark who has not treated the better half of mankind with chivalry and homage. Some of our poets have sinned grievously as writers of licentious verse, but the worst of them have

* Mr. John Forster takes another view of the subject. "Genius," he writes, "often effects its highest gains in a balance of what the world counts for disadvantage and loss; and it has fairly been made matter of doubt if Pope's body had been less crooked whether his verses would have been so straight."



shown fealty to the purity and dignity of woman. Pope, although he had a mother whom he loved with tenderness, has done nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he has struck at women with his keenest weapons, has libelled them, sneered at them, raised the laugh against them, and displayed a capacity for insult that has never been surpassed. We should remember, however, that the age was one of coarse vices and mean aims, and it may be questioned whether any of the Queen Anne men, excepting Sir Richard Steele, whose compliment to Lady Elizabeth Hastings deserves to be immortal, ever paid to women the homage which they deserve. We should recollect, too, that in accordance with the spirit of the time were the "toasts" who ruled the town. Women of rank spoke, wrote, and even acted in a way of which any modest woman would now be ashamed, and it must be owned that the vices and follies of fashionable life afforded ample ground for satire. We have but to read Lord Hervey's Memoirs, the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the correspondence of the Countess of Suffolk, to see the loose views with regard to the relation of the sexes which then prevailed; and while the exquisite raillery of Addison and Steele shows us how women appeared in society, Swift's letters to Stella, and

Pope's letters to Teresa and Martha Blount prove (that is, if Stella and the Blounts may be regarded as representative women) that the delicacy which should guard such an intercourse was in those days unknown.

Pope's relation to the Blounts, both of them beautiful young women, has been regarded as questionable by some writers, and especially by Bowles, who, in his capacity of biographer, continually hints a fault, and throws out a suspicion, and has a fatal facility of misinterpretation. "A friendly but indefinite connection," he says, "a strange mixture of passion, gallantry, licentiousness, and kindness, had long taken place between himself and the Miss Blounts," a statement for which he relied probably on the rumours circulated in Pope's lifetime. Bowles, however, might have been deceived, but this seems unlikely, by the conventional gallantry displayed in the correspondence. "Scandal alone," says Mr. Ward, "(or hyper-conscientious biography), has contrived to pervert the character of Pope's relations towards the ladies of Mapledurham;" and Mrs. Oliphant writes, with a womanly appreciation of the position:

"He was not a man whom it was possible to marry; a fact which, in itself, though not complimentary to the hero, was, as it continues to be, a wonderful recommendation to female friendship. It is indeed the only thing wanting to make that much-

disputed possibility—a true and warm friendship between man and woman without any mixture of love—into a real and pleasant fact. Fools will scoff no doubt, and critics of impure imaginations revile; but it must be a very lively fancy indeed which can suppose any closer bond between the little poet and these two beautiful sisters. . . . Martha Blount made up to Pope for the sister whom he had not, for the wife whom he could not have, and yet was unlike both wife and sister. The link is one so fine, so delicate, so natural, that it is next to impossible to define it; and all the more so as vanity on both sides so seldom permits any realization of this touching and consolatory bond."

The Caryll letters, 150 in number, have been published since these words were written, and from them we gain some information about Teresa and Martha Blount not previously known. In the early days of their friendship Pope appears to have been even more attached to Teresa than to her younger sister. Afterwards he regarded her with extreme aversion, and in his letters to Caryll does his utmost to blast her character, and accuses her of intriguing with a married man, an insinuation which rested, in Mr. Elwin's opinion, upon the idle talk of neighbours and the malicious gossip of discarded servants. Teresa is also accused of cruelty to her mother beyond all imagination, "striking, pinching, pulling about the house, and abusing to the utmost shamefulness," a statement to which Mr. Elwin gives no credit, and yet it seems impossible to believe

that the particulars given by Pope to Martha's godfather were wholly without foundation. Again and again he returns to the subject, and observes that it is the theme of public talk both in London and in the country. Was it simply in raillery that Swift called Teresa the "sanctified sister"?

Pope, like Cowper, was little of a traveller. He was generous enough to propose joining his friend Bishop Atterbury, in exile; and once, also, he talked of making a journey to Italy to meet Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; but he never left England, and his acquaintance with his own country was extremely limited. He frequently made short excursions, and at Bath his little figure was familiar to fashionable loungers; but he never saw a mountain, or took a coast voyage, and knew nothing of our finest scenery. The removal from Binfield to Chiswick was regarded as one of the grand eras of his life, and when, two years afterwards, he took the lease of a house and played the part of a landscape gardener on five acres at Twickenham, it probably caused him as much excitement as an Englishman of our day would feel upon leaving his native land for Canada or New Zealand. Of the villa he was proud, for he owed it to his poetry as Scott owed Abbotsford to the Waverley novels, and one cannot but regret that a



house so closely associated with the genius of Pope does not still exist to enshrine his memory. Landscape gardening was not studied in those days as it has been studied since, and much of the poet's work on his estate was of a meretricious kind. He spent above 1000*l.* on his grotto, and was evidently delighted with his achievement, which most men now-a-days will regard as utterly contemptible; and Mr. Carruthers publishes a correspondence in which the poet, not four years before his death, thanks Dr Oliver, of Bath, and two of his friends for their contributions to his "plaything." The Doctor in his reply writes after this quaint fashion:

"Sir, you make this month tedious by promising to see me in the next. I hope to meet you in a state of health likely to keep you many years above ground; but whenever the world is robbed of you where can you be better deposited than in your own grotto? for I know you have no ambition to be laid near kings, and lie where you will, your own works must be your everlasting monument."

Many pleasant glimpses are given us of the poet in connection with his small estate at Twickenham, and some which are not pleasant or favourable to his memory. Pope affected to live the life of a recluse; but his was the seclusion of a man of letters, able to gather round him all who were illustrious in

the world of literature, and many of the aristocratic personages who ruled in the world of fashion. We forget the poet's bickerings and literary dishonesties when we see him at his villa in the society of warm admirers and friends. "Pope," said Warburton, after spending a week at Twickenham, "is as good a companion as a poet, and, what is more, appears to be as good a man." In 1726, the year that witnessed the completion of 'Gulliver's Travels,' Swift paid him a visit of four months, and the two friends went in company to the little court of the Princess of Wales at Leicester House and at Richmond Hill. A brilliant scene must that Court of the Opposition have presented when Gay and Swift, Arbuthnot and Pope chatted in the saloons or gossiped with Mary Bellenden, "soft and fair as down," and "youth's youngest daughter, sweet Lepell," in the gardens of the palace. Sometimes the pleasure of a lonely ramble with a beauty of the court charmed the poet's fancy, if it did not affect his heart. "Mrs. Lepell," he once wrote to Teresa Blount, "walked with me three or four hours by moonlight, and we met no creature of any quality but the king, who gave audience to the vice-chamberlain all alone under the garden wall."

In 1727 Swift came over again from Ireland,



and once more took up his residence with Pope. It was his last visit to England. Attached as he was to Pope,* Swift never seems to have felt quite at his ease at Twickenham. His host apparently paid him too much attention, and, with one exception, was over-careful to promote his comfort. The exception was a stint of wine to his guests, a meanness which Swift refers to more than once. "I tell you," he writes to Gay, "that I fear my Lord Bolingbroke and Mr. Pope — a couple of philosophers — would starve me, for even of port wine I should require half a pint a day, and as much at night. . . . You have not forgot 'Gentlemen, I will leave you to your wine,' which was but the remainder of a pint when four glasses were drunk. I tell that story to everybody in commendation of Mr. Pope's abstemiousness." And, alluding to Pope and Bolingbroke, in a letter to Arbuthnot he says: "They are both too temperate and too wise for me, too profound, and too poor." Pope, perhaps, like some other men of a generous nature, had occasional fits of niggardliness. He earned the epithet of "paper-sparing" Pope; but he was of a charitable disposition, and stinginess in the way of

* On his presentation copy of the 'Dunciad,' Swift wrote *Auctoris Amicissimi Donum.*

hospitality was as alien to his disposition as it was to the spirit of the age. His weak health demanded the strictest temperance, but he loved good living only too well. "He certainly," says Dr. King (from whose statement, however, something must be deducted, as he was himself a total abstainer), "hastened his death by feeding much on high-seasoned dishes and drinking spirits;" and if we may credit the disagreeable assertion of Lord Bathurst in writing to Mrs. Howard, "he made himself sick every meal at your most moderate and plain table in England."

Pope's associates could not teach him the virtue of temperance. Robert, Earl of Oxford, was accused by the Queen of often coming into her presence drunk; and when his ignoble career was over, he "resigned himself to a sottishness that hastened his end." His son Edward, who succeeded to the title, and whose name is intimately associated with Pope's, having fallen into pecuniary difficulties, copied his father's example, and drank himself to death. Gay, although for some period of his life a water drinker, was, like Thomson, fat and lethargic. Swift accused him, but the accusation was made to Gay himself, of a rooted laziness, and utter impatience of fatigue; and Congreve observes that he was a great eater. Pope describes him, not



inappropriately, as sprinkled with rose-water, and living "in burrage, balm, and burnet, up to the chin with the Duchess of Queensberry" who may be said to have killed him with kindness. As he himself said, he had "no one pursuit in life"; indeed he appears to have died of ennui and of good living. Fenton, one of Pope's associates in the translation of the 'Odyssey,' "died of a great chair and two bottles of port a day." Arbuthnot, whose character in many respects was eminently noble, and of whom Swift said, "He has more wit than we all have, and more humanity than wit," was noted for his "carnivoracity," and, in the words of his admirer, Lord Chesterfield, "indulged his appetite to excess, I might have said to gluttony, which gave him a gross, plethoric habit of body, that was the cause of his death." Parnell, too, died from intemperance in his thirty-ninth year; and Swift, who considered himself a very temperate man, since he never drank more than his physician prescribed, which was no doubt sufficient, as the physician's own allowance was two bottles of claret after dinner daily—gave way once at least in his life to inordinate gluttony, from which he was destined to suffer ever afterwards. When Swift, forsaking the fallen fortunes of his Whig friends, who had treated him shabbily, promising much and doing little, was making friends

among the Tories in the three memorable years of his life 1710–12, he seems to have indulged his appetite far more than was good for him. Day after day he was asked to dine with great men, and what with Burgundy, Tokay, and bad punch, suffered in consequence. "The ugly, nasty, filthy wine," he calls it, but was ready enough to drink again when the opportunity offered.*

Pope had a not unwholesome dread of Irish hospitality, and declined a visit to Swift on the plea that if he escaped the peril of the sea he would be killed with eating and drinking.

"My ailments are such that I really believe a sea-sickness—considering the oppression of colical pains and the great weakness of my breast—would kill me, and if I did not die of that, I must of the excessive eating and drinking of your hospitable town."

Bolingbroke was a frequent guest at Twickenham, and Pope visited his lordship at Dawley, from whence he writes one day that they had nothing for dinner but mutton broth, beans and bacon, and a barn-door fowl. One night, we are told, and the anecdote is characteristic of the period, after the poet had been

* Swift lived for the most part moderately in his deanery, and at a cost which, when contrasted with the expenses of our day, seems ridiculously and enviably small: "I can buy a chicken," he writes, "for a groat, and entertain three or four friends with as many dishes and two or three bottles of French wine for 10*s*. When I dine alone, my pint and chicken with the appendices, cost me about 15*d*."



dining at Dawley, Lord Bolingbroke sent him home in a coach and six. "A small bridge about a mile from Pope's residence was broken down, and the postilion taking the water, the coach came in contact with the trunk of a tree and was overturned. Before the coachman could get to Pope's assistance, the water had reached the knots of his periwig. The glass was broken, and he was rescued, but not until he had received a severe wound in his right hand, which for some time disqualified him for writing." Whereupon Voltaire, who was at Dawley, wrote to the poet in a strain which sounds ineffably absurd in modern ears, saying, that the water was not Hippocrene's or it would have respected him, and adding, "Is it possible that those fingers which have written the 'Rape of the Lock' and the 'Criticism,' which have dressed Homer so becomingly in an English coat, should have been so barbarously treated?" *

When Pope had attained the summit of his fame,

* Voltaire had been received by the poet at Twickenham, and is said to have talked so grossly as to drive Mrs. Pope from the room. The Prince of Wales, afterwards George II., must have been also an occasional guest, for Dr. Johnson records that Pope once slumbered at his own table while the Prince was talking of poetry. No doubt the talk on such a subject was stupid enough, if we may judge from the intellect of the speaker, and perhaps under the circumstances the poet's want of politeness may be forgiven. We wonder whether he ever nodded in his chair when Gay and Arbuthnot, Swift and St. John were seated at his board!

a Scotchman came to London with scarcely a penny in his pocket, but with strong hope in his heart. He had not money enough to buy himself a pair of shoes, but he had written a poem called 'Winter,' and this poem was not only destined to make the poet's fortune, but to effect a revolution in English poetry. We are apt to forget how much we owe to Thomson, whose landscape, as Mr. Palgrave has well observed, seems conventional to us, "although it startled his contemporaries like a heresy." He led our poets back to the nature which they had long deserted, and in spite of his affectation may be regarded as the poetical ancestor of Cowper. Thomson, who flourished on his genius, and became "more fat than bard beseems," was a near neighbour of the Twickenham poet, who honoured his tragedy of 'Agamemnon' by witnessing its representation on the first night, and had, to quote Dr. Johnson's words, "much regard for Thomson." Thomson's hairdresser relates that when Pope called on his brother bard he usually wore a light-coloured great-coat, which he kept on in the house. "He was" (we quote the barber's opinion) "a strange, ill-formed, little figure of a man, but I have heard him and Quin and Patterson talk so together at Thomson's that I could have listened to them for ever." One of the most interesting



points in connection with the intimacy that existed between Pope and Thomson is the fact that the elder poet revised the 'Seasons,' and that his alterations were adopted by the author. In this instance alone did Pope try his hand at blank verse, and certainly, in the passage quoted by Mr. Carruthers, in which Lavinia is compared to a myrtle blooming in the hollow breast of the mountains, "beneath the shelter of encircling hills," Pope has not only produced a beautiful simile, but has proved that he might have been occasionally successful without the aid of rhyme. We say occasionally, for Pope's poetical instrument was as indubitably the heroic couplet, as Paganini's musical instrument was the fiddle.

One of Pope's latest and sincerest friendships was with Spence, "a good-natured harmless little soul," according to Walpole, "but more like a silver penny than a genius." Pope visited the honest clergyman and anecdote-monger at Oxford, and the pleasant letter in which Spence describes the interview to his mother is worth recording. It was written in 1735, nine years before the death of the poet.

"Monday last after dinner, according to the good sauntering custom that I use here every day, I was lolling at a coffee-house half asleep, and half reading something about Prince Eugene and the armies on the Rhine, when a ragged boy of an ostler came in to me with a little scrap of paper not half an inch

broad, which contained the following words, 'Mr. Pope would be very glad to see Mr. Spence at the Cross Inn just now.' You may imagine how pleased I was; and that I hobbled thither as fast as my spindle-shanks would carry me. There I found him quite fatigued to death, with a thin face lengthened at least two inches beyond its usual appearance. He had been to take his last leave of Lord Peterborough; and came away in a chariot of his lordship's, that holds but one person for quick travelling. When he was got within about three miles of Oxford, coming down a hill in Bagly wood, he saw two gentlemen and a lady sitting in distress by the wayside. Near them lay a chaise overturned, and half broken to pieces; in the fall of which the poor lady had her arm broke. Mr. Pope had the goodness to stop and offer her his chariot to carry her to Oxford for help; and so walked the three miles in the very midst of a close sultry day, and came in dreadfully fatigued. An inn, though designed for a place of rest, is but ill-suited to a man that's really tired; so I prevailed on him to go to my room, where I got him a little dinner, and where he enjoyed himself for two or three hours."

Pope was on terms of familiarity with many persons of noble birth, but he knew his own value too well to be guilty of sycophancy. Sometimes, indeed, there are expressions in his letters which savour of this vice, as when, shortly before his death, he tells the Earl of Marchmont that he desires chiefly to live for his sake; but complimentary phrases such as these were current in polite society, and meant little. "Pope," says Dr. Johnson, "never set genius to sale, he never flattered those whom he did not love, or praised those whom he did not esteem." Mr.



Carruthers repeats the story that Pope declined the honour of a visit from Queen Caroline, but adds to it this comment:

"Had Pope been ambitious of courtly distinction, he could have had little difficulty in obtaining access to the queen, who was fond of being considered the patroness of learning and genius. He did not affect such honours, but he could never have refused a proffered visit from her Majesty; he would rather have exulted, dressed in his best suit of black velvet, his tie-wig, and small sword, to lead the gracious Caroline round his laurel circus, and through his grotto."

For the sake of friendship he declined another honour more acceptable to a man of letters than a visit from royalty. In 1741, Pope and Warburton visited Oxford together, and it was proposed to confer upon the poet the degree of D.C.L., and upon the divine the title of D.D. "Intrigue and envy," according to Bishop Hurd, defeated this scheme for doing honour to Warburton, and Pope resolved to share the fortune of his friend. "I will be doctored with you," he said, "or not at all." He died three years after this, on May 30, 1744, leaving the principal part of his property to Martha Blount for her life. There is a horrible story told in Dr. Johnson's biography, which is not only highly improbable, but appears to lack all evidence. "While he was yet capable of amusement and conversation, as

he was one day sitting in the air with Lord Bolingbroke and Lord Marchmont, he saw his favourite Martha Blount at the bottom of the terrace, and asked Lord Bolingbroke to go and hand her up. Bolingbroke, not liking his errand, crossed his legs and sat still; but Lord Marchmont, who was younger and less captious, waited on the lady, who when he came to her asked, 'What, is he not dead yet?'"

The unlikelihood of this anecdote is obvious. If Martha had been cold-hearted enough to forget in Pope's last hours the friendship of a lifetime, it is scarcely possible she would have given vent to her feelings before a friend of the poet, at the very moment too in which he was leading her towards him. Mr. Ward does not record this anecdote, and we may therefore conclude does not accept it as genuine. Only a month or two before, Pope had expressed for Martha Blount the most affectionate interest, and we would not willingly believe that his friendship received so ungrateful a return. Where Johnson heard the story we are not told, but it receives no corroboration from Spence, who quotes, as Mr. Carruthers observes, a remark of Warburton's, that it "was very observable during Pope's last illness that Mrs. Blount's coming in gave a new turn of spirits or a temporary strength to him."



It is a relief to turn from this painful, and we doubt not, unveracious anecdote, to the beautiful words in which the death of Pope has been described by Mr. Thackeray, and so appositely does the quotation fall in here, that no apology need be made for citing a familiar passage:

"As for his death, it was what the noble Arbuthnot asked and enjoyed for himself—a euthanasia—a beautiful end. A perfect benevolence, affection, serenity, hallowed the departure of that high soul. Even in the very hallucinations of his brain, and weaknesses of his delirium, there was something almost sacred. Spence describes him in his last days, looking up and with a rapt gaze as if something had suddenly passed before him. 'He said to me, "What's that?" pointing into the air with a very steady regard, and then looked down and said with a smile of the greatest softness, "'Twas a vision!"' He laughed scarcely ever, but his companions describe his countenance as often illuminated by a peculiar sweet smile.

"'When,' said Spence, the kind anecdotist whom Johnson despised, 'when I was telling Lord Bolingbroke that Mr. Pope, on every catching and recovery of his mind, was always saying something kindly of his present or absent friends, and that this was so surprising, as it seemed to me as if humanity had outlasted understanding, Lord Bolingbroke said "It has so," and then added, "I never in my life knew a man who had so tender a heart for his particular friends, or a more general friendship for mankind. I have known him these thirty years, and value myself more for that man's love than—" Here,' Spence says, 'St. John sunk his head and lost his voice in tears.' The sob which finishes the epitaph is finer than words. It is the cloak thrown over the father's face in the famous Greek picture, which hides the grief and heightens it."*

* 'English Humourists,' p. 518. Smith, Elder, and Co.

The sympathy that must always exist between great men of letters is illustrated by these words of Thackeray. -He forgets for the moment, as it is meet he should forget in the solemn presence of death, all that was weak and worse than weak in the poet's conduct, and thinks only of the high virtues that ennobled him — his courage, his resignation, his generous affection, his tenderness for those whom he loved! The example afforded by this admirable humourist and critic may be of service to anyone who, like the present writer, ventures at a far wider intellectual distance, to estimate the moral worth or the mental greatness of a master spirit in literature.

It is more than unfortunate that the memorials left by Pope at Twickenham, his house, his grounds, the monuments he raised in his garden, should have been ruthlessly removed to suit the whims and requirements of persons who would, save for these acts of barbarism, be wholly unknown to posterity. After the poet's death Sir William Stanhope enlarged the house and spoilt the grounds; the next tenant, the Right Hon. Welbore Ellis, showed more reverence for Pope's memory; at his death the estate was sold by auction to Sir John Briscoe, and on his decease it came unhappily into the hands of the



Baroness Howe, who "razed the house to the ground, and blotted out entirely every memorial of the poet." The latest historian of the village writes:

"All then that Twickenham has preserved of her greatest resident is in the church, a grave wherein his remains rest (and these Mr. Howitt would say mutilated and imperfect) impenetrably sealed up, and all traces of its exact site entirely hidden from view; two words on a tablet, and a date, and last of all a monument remarkable for the pre-eminent bad taste of the inscription; from this, during the restoration of the church in 1859, the whole of its marble laurel wreath was chipped off bit by bit by wretches who wanted to possess a piece of Pope's tomb. Outside the church nothing remains but his grotto, now despoiled of most of its former adornments." *

The statement of Mr. Howitt that Pope's skeleton was mutilated, and another skull put in the place of the poet's, was denied at the time, and has not been confirmed since. Yet there is a strange contradiction in the tale as related by Mr. Proby, the vicar, and by the stonemason who opened the vault, the one asserting that a cast of the skull was taken by his permission, and the other that such a thing would have been impossible, as the skull would only just hold together.

There were three things dear to Pope upon this earth—his parents, his friends, and his fame; there was one thing he hated persistently with the whole

* 'Memorials of Twickenham, Parochial and Topographical.' By the Rev. U. S. Cobbett, M.A. Smith, Elder, and Co.

force of his mind, namely, the criticism whose weakness opposed itself to his strength. We never find in him what we find in his great contemporary Bishop Berkeley, a noble, self-denying enthusiasm; he had no special hatred of moral evil, but he was a thorough good hater of anyone who ventured to question his sovereignty in the realm of letters. This was neither amiable nor wise, but the fault is softened down when we consider the age and the man. The hacks of literature—and the town swarmed with them—indulged in the grossest personal attacks. Nobody was spared unless he were fortunate enough to be obscure, or unless he had too strong an arm and too stout a cudgel to be insulted with impunity. Nothing was too sacred to be exempted from attack. The figure, the features, the voice, the man's private habits, were held up to laughter, and everyone was considered fair game whose religion or politics was opposed to that of the libeller, or who had excited envy by literary success. A cripple, whose bodily weakness was so extreme that he required an attendant to dress him, who professed a faith that was proscribed by law, and who without a university education rose by dint of study and genius to be one of the most conspicuous men in England, was not likely to escape detraction. Pope, however, eager for the fray, was the first to throw down the glove.



He rushed into the arena before he had received a challenge, and from the day when, as a young poet, he provoked Dennis in the 'Essay on Criticism,' until the day—it was not very long before his death—that he published the latest edition of the 'Dunciad,' he lived as a man to whom literary warfare was as the breath of life. The pen of Grub Street was not his only enemy. When he satirized Philips—"namby-pamby Philips"*—in the 'Guardian,' that worthy is said to have hung a rod up at Button's with which to castigate the poet-dwarf, and it is related that when Pope took his wonted walk at Twickenham he carried pistols and was accompanied by a large dog. One of the coarse lampoons of the time relates that Pope received a whipping while walking near the river, and this announcement was followed by a pretended advertisement supposed to have been inserted in the 'Daily Post,' June 14, 1728.

"Whereas, there has been a scandalous paper cried aloud about the streets, under the title of 'A Pop upon Pope,' insinuating that I was whipped in Ham Walks on Thursday last:—This is to give notice, that I did not stir out of my house at Twickenham all that day; and the same is a malicious and ill-founded report.—A. P."

* "Pope and Philips," says Johnson, "lived in a perpetual reciprocation of malevolence."

A vulgar squib like this would not have appeared so silly in those days as in ours. Men who wrote too freely were frequently punished by Lynch law, and Defoe mentions several attempts that were made upon his person. Pope, feeble though he was in body, was free from the taint of cowardice, and laughed at the threats of his opponents just as he occasionally laughed at their attacks on paper. He could afford to do so always, but sometimes read them with bitterness. Men like Dennis, Theobald, and Gildon were not likely permanently to damage his reputation, but they often touched him to the quick, and Pope found it impossible to conceal what he felt. "These things are my diversion," he once exclaimed with a ghastly smile, but as he spoke he writhed in agony like a man undergoing an operation. His more notable quarrels were with Addison and with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. In the first case, it is to be feared, he had only himself to blame; in the second, the provocation may have come from Lady Mary, but Pope had no right to resent what was at worst a lady's folly, and never showed himself less the man than when he assailed his former friend. Addison has been painted in the brightest colours by his admirers, and especially by the latest and



greatest, Lord Macaulay. He is one of the most delightful of writers, and, according to Steele and Tickell, was the most agreeable of men. He was sixteen years older than Pope, and had reached the summit of the mountain when the younger poet was still struggling at the base. There should have been no jealousy here, for the paths of the two men were diverse. Pope owed everything to his pen; he was either a great poet, an inimitable satirist, or he slunk at once among the common herd. The position of Addison was more assured. He was a statesman as well as an author, he had gained one of the highest posts in the state, he had won fame, wealth, and a countess (though whether the lady were a gain may be questioned), and if Pope beat him in verse, and he did beat him incontestably, he could not approach his admirable prose, which remains perhaps unequalled to this day. Addison had his faults, but we do not believe that a rancorous jealousy was one of them. As much cannot be said of Pope, and it is sad to believe that the keenest satire he ever penned was written unworthily.

The famous Lady Mary controversy is more painful still, and the disgrace to Pope is deeper. There may have been severe provocation. The pretty, lively, witty woman had been flattered by Pope's

attentions, or had amused herself with his strange gallantry. He wrote beautiful verses in her praise, and once, according to her own report, spoke words of love in her ear. The "woman of fashion," as Mrs. Oliphant calls her, burst into a fit of laughter, and the poet's love was turned to deadly hate. His unmanly satire of Lady Mary is, we think, the worst act of Pope's life, for the story that he took a bribe of 1000*l.* from the Duchess of Marlborough to suppress the character of Atossa is, to say the least, not proven, despite Mrs. Oliphant's assertion to the contrary. Lady Mary, grossly treated as she had been, retaliated after a gross fashion, in lines sneering at Pope's deformity. She even wrote to Lord Peterborough to ask if the poet's disgusting couplet applied to her—a significant proof of the frank coarseness of the age. Had she remained silent the provocation would have been forgotten, and she would have commanded the sympathy of the world.

We have mentioned but two quarrels of the many which engaged Pope's thoughts and pen, and for our purpose these will suffice; but it is significant that not only was the poet quarrelling through the best portion of his life, but that his spirit seems to have animated several of the editors and authors who have attempted to vindicate or to blacken his name.



Warburton, who did a great deal of dirty work for Pope in his notes to the 'Dunciad,' was continually slashing right and left at real or imaginary foes : he abused his friends, he maligned his enemies, he condescended to mean acts, such, unhappily, as he might have learnt from Pope, and he disgraced his name and his profession by a succession of ignoble quarrels. "I do not know," said Dr. Johnson to the king who talked of the controversy between Warburton and Lowth, "which of them calls names best." No sooner was Pope dead than Bolingbroke, who had wept over his deathbed and was appointed his sole executor, began to traduce his memory, and what he could not decently say himself he paid Mallet to say for him. Between the philosopher and the bishop there existed, according to Disraeli, a mortal hatred, and without tracing all the literary quarrels that had their fountain-head at Twickenham, it will suffice to refer to the controversy which raged at the beginning of this century between Bowles and Roscoe, in which Byron and Campbell took so prominent a part.

In no account of Pope is it possible, however much we might desire it, to pass over the mystifications of his correspondence. The researches pursued with such masterly ability by Mr. Dilke have proved incontestably the meanness and duplicity of Pope in

the publication of his correspondence.* It is wearisome and painful to follow this acute critic in his elaborate exposure of the poet's machinations. It exhibits him in the most contemptible light; it shows, what was never seen so clearly before, that in his miserable anxiety to enhance his literary fame, Pope was willing not only to deceive the public, but also to deceive and libel his most intimate friends. We now know that his published letters were cooked and re-cooked, that he sometimes altered the opinions of his correspondents to suit his personal views, that in many cases the letters were not addressed to the persons whose names they bear, that the dates were changed or omitted to conceal the deception, and that at the very time Pope was lamenting the publication of his letters he was "designing to send a fresh instalment of them to the press." Everybody who has read any of the biographies of Pope will remember the plot against Curll; how that bookseller was communicated with

* See 'The Papers of a Critic.' 2 vols. John Murray. Mr. Dilke's "discoveries," for such they may be called, were printed in the 'Athenæum' more than twenty years ago. His facts are incontestable, his arguments cannot be impugned; nevertheless, in the reprint of the Aldine edition of 'Pope's Poetical Works,' the Memoir, by Dyce, is published without a line of correction or any intimation that recent criticism with regard to the correspondence has upset the statements of Roscoe which are accepted by the io grapher.



by a mysterious personage known as P. T., who offered him for publication a large printed collection of the poet's letters—how a man in a clerical gown and a barrister's lawn band went to Curll at night and showed him most of the sheets of the volume and some original letters—how a large number of copies were taken by the unscrupulous bookseller, and on the report that they contained letters from noblemen were seized by an order from the House of Lords next day—how by a knowing fraud of P. T., who tried in vain to make the bookseller prevaricate and give false evidence, the Committee of the Lords were compelled to drop the matter—how a narrative was published which professed to reveal the whole story, but which revealed nothing about the purloiner of the correspondence—and how finally Pope published the letters himself on the plea that he was forced to do so.

Pope's story was received at the time, as Johnson tells us, with different degrees of credit, and the Doctor himself, although writing partly in the dark, had no doubt that Pope contrived the plot to serve his own purpose. That this was the case is now evident, yet, despite the suspicions of his contemporaries, the deed was never proved against Pope in his lifetime. Not only were the Wycherley letters, the letters of 1735,

and the Swift letters all dishonestly published, but in each case the poet attempted to divert the blame and the responsibility from himself, and to fix it on his friends. With regard to Swift, his best and oldest friend, his conduct was especially blameworthy, for it was not until his great contemporary was sinking into his dotage that he carried out his design. Years before, Swift, who cared little for literary reputation, and never resorted to any artifice to promote it, had suspected Pope of a desire to make literary capital out of their correspondence, and the poet had excused himself according to his wonted fashion.* After the

* "I find," says Swift (in a letter printed for the first time in Mr. Elwin's edition), "you have been a writer of letters almost from your infancy, and by your own confession had schemes even then of epistolary fame. Montaigne says that if he could have excelled in any kind of writing it would have been in letters; but I doubt they would not have been natural, for it is plain that all Pliny's letters were written with a view of publishing; and I accuse Voiture himself of the same crime, although he be an author I am fond of. They cease to be letters when they become a *jeu d'esprit*." This is a significant passage, and one that Pope was not likely to read or to remember without painful feelings. It shows how thoroughly Swift had gauged his weakness and the contempt he felt for it. One can picture the Dean's sardonic smile when reading Pope's reply: "I am pleased to see your partiality, and it is for that reason I have kept some of your letters and some of those of my other friends. These, if I put together in a volume for my own secret satisfaction, in reviewing a life passed in innocent amusements and studies, not without the goodwill of worthy and ingenious men, do not therefore say I aim at epistolary fame. I never had any fame less in my head."



publication by Curll he begged Swift to return him his letters, lest they should fall into the bookseller's hands. The Dean replied, no doubt to Pope's infinite chagrin, that they were safe in his keeping, as he had given strict orders in his will that his executors should burn every letter he might leave behind him. Afterwards he promised that Pope should eventually have them, but declined giving them up during his lifetime. Hereupon Pope changed his tactics and begged that he might have the letters to print. The publication by Curll of two letters (probably another *ruse* of Pope's) formed an additional ground for urging his request. All his efforts were unavailing until he obtained the assistance of Lord Orrery, to whom Swift was at length induced to deliver up the letters. There was an hiatus in the correspondence, and Pope took advantage of this and of a blunder made by Swift, whose memory at the time was not to be trusted, to hint what he dared not directly assert, that the bulk of the collection remained with the Dean and that Swift's own letters had been returned to him. We have now irresistible proof that the Dublin edition of the letters was taken from an impression sent from England and sent by Pope. Nor was this all. The poet acted with still greater meanness, for he had the audacity to deplore the sad

vanity of Swift in permitting the publication of his correspondence, and to declare that "no decay of body is half so miserable." In the introduction to the first volume of his edition, Mr. Elwin, following the path opened up for him by Mr. Dilke, has laid bare all the artifices of Pope with regard to his correspondence. He has been blamed for so doing, but we do not see how the miserable narrative was to be avoided. Truth is more precious than even the reputation of a poet, and there is no greater blunder than to suppose that because a man has genius, his moral failings are to be concealed or condoned. Pope lied abominably, and, in the words of Mr. Leslie Stephen, "a gentleman convicted at the present day of practices comparable to those in which Pope indulged so freely, might find it expedient to take his name off the books of any respectable club." * To ignore the painful fact was impossible; the mistake, as it seems to us, lies in the prominent place assigned by Mr. Elwin to this exposition of the poet's mendacity.

Pope said once what he certainly did not believe, that he could not write agreeable letters, and he never uttered a truer word. It would have been better for his reputation if he had not published a

* 'Hours in a Library.' First Series. Smith, Elder, and Co.



single letter; better, considering the insincerity of his correspondence, if he had never written one. It is the charm of Cowper's letters that they are as natural as spring flowers. There is art in those of Walpole, but such art that they generally appear unstudied. Moreover Walpole's correspondence abounds in entertaining gossip, and we forget his defects as a letter writer in the amusement we glean from him as a chronicler of town talk. Pope's letters, on the contrary, have no spontaneity, and no great variety of interest. The well-turned compliments, the carefully constructed periods, the superfine morality of the poet ring hollow. "He laboured them," says Horace Walpole, "as much as the 'Essay on Man'; and as they were written to everybody, they do not look as if they had been written to anybody." Nevertheless Pope, whose taste was almost always correct with regard to literary matters, knew well that ease and freedom are essential to good letter writing. He never forgot that such compositions ought to be unpremeditated, and that whatever charm they possess should be caught from the feelings of the moment. Again and again he assures his correspondents that he is writing in careless haste, that he does not stay to correct, that his words

spring warm from his heart, that his letters are "wretched papers" and "unconsidered trifles," but these assertions rarely deceived his friends (they never deceived Swift), and we now know as a fact what Johnson and Cowper guessed at without our knowledge, that Pope's letters are manufactured, and that, in the language of Bowles, the ease is laboured, and the warmth studied. The truth is Pope was blinded by literary vanity. In his eagerness to carry out what Swift shrewdly calls his "schemes of epistolary fame," he resorted to the most pitiful arts, and the result of his pains was to disgrace himself as a man, and to lower his reputation as an author. If we could believe the letters, Pope was one of the wisest and most virtuous of mortals. Submission to the will of God, indifference as to the world's opinion, contempt for literary fame, sincerity towards friends, forgiveness of enemies, an anxiety to live well and to die well—these are the feelings expressed by the writer again and again. "I am ambitious of nothing," he writes, "but the good opinion of good men." "That man," he observes, "makes a mean figure in the eye of reason who is measuring syllables and coupling rhymes when he should be mending his own soul and securing his own immor-



tality."* "It is not our business," he writes again, "to be guessing what the state of souls shall be, but to be doing what may make our own state happy. We cannot be knowing but we can be virtuous." And in a letter to Martha Blount he says:

"Wit I am sure I want; at least to the degree that I see others have it. . . . I would cut off my own head if it had nothing better than wit in it, and tear out my own heart if it had no better dispositions than to love only myself, and to laugh at all my neighbours."

There are scores of such fine sentiments, for Pope's letters, to quote Johnson's familiar words, "exhibit a perpetual and unclouded effulgence of general benevolence and particular fondness." Unfortunately we know that these sentiments are generally false, and that in the stern language of Mr.

* Which may remind the reader of the noble passage in the epistle to Lord Bolingbroke:

"Long, as to him who works for debt, the day,
Long as the night to her whose Love's away,
Long as the year's dull circle seems to run,
When the brisk minor pants for twenty-one:
So slow th' unprofitable moments roll,
That lock up all the functions of my soul;
That keep me from myself; and still delay
Life's instant business to a future day;
That task which as we follow or despise,
The eldest is a fool, the youngest wise;
Which done, the poorest can no wants endure,
And which not done, the richest must be poor."

Elwin, "Pope was accustomed to say what was convenient, without much regard to what is true." When he writes, however, of his father and mother he forgets his literary artifices and displays the honest affection which he undoubtedly felt. To his parents his conduct was uniformly considerate and tender, and Dr. Johnson's saying is as true as it is beautiful, that "life has among its soothing and quiet comforts few things better to give than such a son."

The fact that Pope was a manufacturer of epistles does by no means wholly destroy the interest of his correspondence. He was the first poet of his day; the most powerful intellect of that time was his friend and correspondent for a quarter of a century; he wrote to, and received letters from, the principal wits of the town; he was the friend of Atterbury and Arbuthnot, of Bolingbroke and Gay, of Steele and Parnell; and thus Pope's letters, strained and laboured though they be, but enlivened by the answers of his correspondents, present to us in suggestive fragments a picture of the age for which we may look in vain elsewhere.

It is pleasant to turn from the correspondence of Pope to his poetry. In prose he exhibited but half his strength, in verse he towered far above his com-

petitors and contemporaries. We are accustomed to call Pope the poet of artificial life, and the remark is not to be gainsayed. If there had been no cities there would have been no Pope. He sings of the manners and morals of the town, not of natural scenery, or when he does make an attempt, as in 'Windsor Forest,' to describe the objects of nature, his heart is not in the work. That poem is full of the conventional phraseology now happily rejected by poets. Take a single and brief specimen:

> "Not proud Olympus yields a nobler sight,
> Though gods assembled grace his towering height,
> Than what more humble mountains offer here,
> Where, in their blessings, all those gods appear.
> See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crown'd,
> Here blushing Flora paints th' enamelled ground,
> Here Ceres' gifts in waving prospect stand,
> And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand."

These lines will suffice for a sample of a poem in which, besides Ceres, Pomona, and Pan, we find allusions to Jove, Diana, Phœbus, and other personages whose connection with Windsor it is difficult to surmise. This was the poetical vice of the period, and a vice that outlasted it, witness the Odes of Gray; unlike Gray, however, and resembling in this respect his great predecessor Dryden, Pope is incompetent to describe the natural beauty which

all of us may behold, or that beauty, more wondrous still, which great poets such as Spenser and Wordsworth see with the eye of faith:

> "The light that never was on sea or land
> The consecration and the Poet's dream."

Of the early poems of Pope the most noteworthy is the 'Essay on Criticism.' It is said to have been written before the poet was twenty, but if, as Mr. Elwin asserts, it exhibits his capacity at twenty-three, our wonder at the force it represents is but little diminished. A poem published one hundred and sixty years ago that contains so many lines still familiar in our mouths must have been preserved by the salt of genius. It is true that the source of many of these lines can be traced to other minds, but Addison is right in saying that the known truths in the poem are placed in so beautiful a light that they have all the graces of novelty; nor is it difficult to agree with Pope himself that "it seems not so much the perfection of sense to say things that had never been said before, as to express those best that have been said oftenest."

> "In every work regard the writer's end,
> Since none can compass more than they intend,"

is a piece of sound counsel, which scarcely seems to have guided Mr. Elwin in his comments on this



youthful production of Pope. He has no words of generous praise to bestow upon the Essay, but takes the view of it held by De Quincey, whom he terms a subtler and sounder critic than Hazlitt. The comparison need not be challenged, but it may be remarked in passing that the subtlety of De Quincey is sometimes more conspicuous than his soundness, and that fine as his critical judgment often is, it is frequently, like Hazlitt's, warped by prejudice. "He thought acutely by fits," says Mr. Leslie Stephen; and we may add that between the fits a cloud obscured his vision and disturbed his mind.

The contradictions of criticism were never displayed more strikingly, than in the judgments passed upon the poem that professes to deal with the art. The work, according to Dr. Johnson, placed Pope among the first critics and the first poets, an opinion which Mr. Elwin, with justice, regards as "preposterous." Probably his own view of it is as much open to question. According to this view it would seem as though a more miserable attempt at poetry were never made by a Grub Street poet.

"Almost anybody," says Mr. Elwin, "may convert ordinary prose into defective verse, and much of the verse in the 'Essay on Criticism' is of a low order. The phraseology is frequently mean and slovenly, the construction inverted and ungrammatical,

the ellipses harsh, the expletives feeble, the metre inharmonious, the rhymes imperfect. Striving to be poetical, Pope fell below bald and slipshod prose. . . . Where the plain portions of the poem are not positively bad, they are seldom of any peculiar excellence. Mediocrity relieved by occasional well-wrought passages forms the staple of the work."

If we accept this verdict we must place the Essay on a level with the poetical productions of Roscommon or of Halifax; but Mr. Elwin's denunciation of its faults is not confined to the strongly expressed opinion we have quoted. He gives a long list of imperfect rhymes, he points out contradictions, and takes pains to prove what a great poet of our century asserted long ago, that Pope's claims to correctness are unfounded. We agree with Mr. Elwin, who in this respect is in harmony with the highest criticism of the age, that the superb mastery over language exhibited by some of our greatest poets is beyond the range of Pope. In purity and strength of diction he ranks below Dryden, whose blunders, like Shelley's, seem to have been the result of indifference or haste. Pope, on the contrary, was the most painstaking of poets, and in a limited sense one of the most correct. This is the virtue which, combined with the modernness of his style, has received high praise from Dr. Abbott, himself a master of English.



"Pope's English," he writes,* "is not only correct, it is also as Dryden's is, modern. There is no substantial difference between it and the English of the present day except that Pope is more exact than most modern authors in the use of words. . . . It is Pope's modernness as well as correctness, that makes him so valuable a model for the student of modern English. I know few better or more valuable lessons in the choice of English words than after reading a passage of Pope to shut the book and to have the verses repeated, with blanks here and there for the student to fill up. By comparing one's failures with the original, one learns to appreciate the unerring exactitude with which Pope elaborated every couplet till it reached absolute perfection. Pope is one of the few poets whose lines cannot be misquoted with impunity. Many of his couplets would be seriously impaired by the change of an epithet, the transformation of a word, nay, even the alteration of a vowel or consonant. Byron was probably not far wrong in calling Pope a poet of a thousand years. Pope's ideal of a poet was not a noble one, but such as it was he rose to its full height. . . . He has expressed the common-places of criticism and of morality in such language as is recognised to be not only the best, but now, the only possible way of expressing them."

This is true, but it is true also that Pope carried his literary proclivities to an almost fastidious length, that he cared sometimes more for words than thoughts, more for shape than substance.

"His interest lay," says Mr. Pattison, alluding to the 'Essay on Man,' "in the elaboration rather than in the matter treated," and what is true of that poem

* 'A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope.' By Edwin Abbott. With an Introduction by Edwin A. Abbott, D.D. Chapman and Hall.

is true also, though in a lesser degree, of a large portion of his verse. Language is the life of poetry, by that the poet is justified and by that condemned, but in poetry more than in any other form of composition, it is imperative that beautiful or lofty thoughts should be linked to rare words.*

Of all poets, save Shakespeare, Pope is the most often quoted, because he has expressed in the most pointed form the common observation of mankind. His lines fix themselves on the memory, and men who care little for poetry and nothing for Pope are

* Leigh Hunt complains somewhere that Pope's versification is a veritable see-saw, and there is some reasonableness in his remark. Take a single instance of this here-we-go-up and here-we-go-down style:

"See the same man, in vigour, in the gout,
Alone, in company, in place, or out;
Early at business and at hazard late;
Mad at a fox-chase, wise at a debate;
Drunk at a borough, civil at a ball;
Friendly at Hackney, faithless at Whitehall."

Such lines remind us of a couplet in the poet's satire of Lord Hervey, which it is possible may have suggested Hunt's comparison:

"His wit all see-saw, between *that* and *this*,
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss."

Pope is seen at his worst in lines like these, and it would be unjust to estimate him by them. In general his versification, though it does not fill and satisfy the ear like the divine music of poets like Milton and Shelley, is extremely happy, and in its degree approaches to, if it does not actually attain, perfection.



accustomed to use his verses, not knowing that they are his, in the daily concerns of life. His line in poetry is strictly limited. His wing never carried him into the highest regions of the art. He had no dramatic power; the epic was out of his reach, and for the lyric, in which supreme excellence is the most rarely attainable, he had no capacity whatever. He could not sing,—a grievous and irreparable want, since poetry in its loveliest utterance is song. He is one of the few great English poets, three or four at most, who never produced a sonnet, and it may be worth observing that he has written none of the verses which children love,* nor any lines which grown-up people care to croon over in moments of weakness or sorrow. After some misdirected efforts Pope understood where his strength lay, and from that moment there was no failure. In ethical and satirical verse he has but one rival amongst English poets.

And he has another claim to immortality. 'The Rape of the Lock,' a poem which stands alone in our literature, is the happiest specimen we possess of ludicrous poetry. Moreover, it is as original as it is

* Pope has no place in Mr. Palgrave's 'Children's Treasury of English Song;' but it must not be forgotten that his 'Homer' has afforded infinite delight to many a boy and girl between the ages, say, of twelve and sixteen.

charming, for Pope's obligations to the 'Lutrin' of Boileau* are too insignificant to detract from the originality of this poem, which De Quincey considers "the most exquisite monument of playful fancy that universal literature offers." The Pope critics, from Johnson to Mr. Elwin, have all joined in praise of this exquisite specimen of the mock-heroic; and Mr. Lowell, whose judgment on things poetical is rarely at fault, observes that "when Pope, as in the 'Rape of the Lock,' found a subject exactly level with his genius, he was able to make what taken for all in all is the most perfect poem in the world." †

It is scarcely necessary to observe that the perfection which Mr. Lowell claims for this unique poem is a relative quality. It is simply perfect of its kind, but the "level" which exactly suited the poet's genius was far from elevated. Mr. Lowell's meaning is made more distinct on the next page of his essay, in which he awards to Pope the praise, and perhaps more than the praise which is his due, since

* "Boileau," says Hallam, "is the analogue of Pope in French literature," a statement which is not sufficiently discriminative. Mr. Swinburne's comparison of the two poets is more satisfactory: "The very best man of his kind, Pope; and Boileau the very worst. He is the finest, and Boileau the dullest, of craftsmen of their age and school."

† 'My Study Windows,' p. 432.



a man may be an unrivalled wit without being a great poet.

"In his own province he still stands unapproachably alone. If to be the greatest satirist of individual men rather than of human nature, if to be the highest expression which the life of the court and the ball-room has ever found in verse, if to have added more phrases to our language than any other but Shakespeare, if to have charmed four generations make a man a great poet, then he is one. . . . Measured by any high standard of imagination he will be found wanting; tried by any test of wit he is unrivalled."

The want of this "high standard" may possibly in Pope's age have enhanced his reputation. Literature was an exquisite pursuit then as always, but the form it took was not particularly noble. A certain moderation of tone, a certain lack of enthusiasm, the want of any splendid ideal, characterized the Queen Anne men. We see this defect in Addison and Swift and Steele, we see it still more clearly in Prior and Defoe, we see it in the theological and political writings of the period. In an age in which Addison, Swift, and Pope ruled in the domain of letters, in which theologians found their spokesman in Atterbury, and polemics in Sacheverell, the splendid heroes of an earlier and greater century would have found no resting place. Milton, fierce disputant though he was, would have scorned the peddling animosities



and petty jealousies which occupied the "Twickenham poet," Atterbury's courtly genius, of the earth earthy, could have had no attractions for the saintly Taylor, the Chrysostom of English divines.

The weak points of the 'Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady' are pointed out by Mr. Elwin with a feeling that approaches to harshness. He condemns its "sophistries," its "erroneous, inconsistent, or inadequate" ideas, its "false and melodramatic" sentiments; and observes that the best part of the poem consists chiefly "of borrowed pictures, which are too artificial for the occasion." Dr. Johnson's opinion of the poem is equally adverse, and both criticisms, although expressed a little too strongly, are in the main correct. Who the 'Unfortunate Lady' was is unknown to this day, and Mr. Elwin is probably right in conjecturing that the poem is a fancy piece. The internal evidence points that way, and the opinion is confirmed by a perusal of the Caryll correspondence. Caryll asks Pope twice who the lady was, but the poet replies to his letters without answering the question. It is not impossible that the poem may be partly founded on truth and be in part pure fiction, an alternative that does not seem to have occurred to Mr. Elwin. He accuses



Pope of a "puerile deception" and of a "petty fraud," a severe judgment surely, since a poet is not to be judged by the same rules as an historian. "He adopted," we are told, "the common incident of a miserable girl having recourse to self-destruction, and he wished to have it believed that he had a personal interest in her fate." And what if he did? Poetry, in Lord Bacon's judgment, fills the imagination with the shadow of a lie, but he adds that "it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it that doeth the hurt." That Pope, having found or invented a romantic heroine, should have linked his fate with hers at the conclusion of his poem, seems to us an effort of fancy quite as legitimate as any of the artifices to which poets have so freely resorted in all ages. Pope's fault, if fault there be, lay in his affectation of mystery when questioned on the subject in plain prose, but if a writer choose to have a literary secret he is not bound to answer the inquiries of curious friends; and that men of the highest honour and integrity can delight in these mystifications, and may indulge in them without offence, is proved by the illustrious example of Sir Walter Scott. The Elegy itself deserves, we think, scarcely more praise than Mr. Elwin has awarded it.



The poem is immoral in tendency, and unless we hold that the spheres of art and of morality are essentially distinct, that the poet, while exercising his genius, is a law unto himself, a belief that ignores conscience and the rule of a Supreme Governor, we are forced to condemn the lax views expressed by Pope in this piece. A man may be a splendid poet and an unorthodox theologian; but false morality, unlike doubtful theology, gives to poetry as well as to human society an ineradicable taint. Happily Pope's praise of suicide is too vague and too high flown to exert an injurious influence; but we owe him no thanks if his rather pompous lines prove wholly innocuous. In a literary point of view the merits of the poem are few, its pathos appears forced, its imagery conventional; but it contains some lines familiar to all readers, which none but Pope could have written. The concluding passage shows how possible it is for a great artist to express natural, we might almost say commonplace, reflections in a form which at least charms the reader if it does not more powerfully affect him. It may be true that "the dreary close of the poem sets aside the faith which consoles survivors," but what the poet gives us, however defective in a religious sense, is of exquisite literary quality.

"So peaceful rests, without a stone, a name,
What once had beauty, titles, wealth, and fame.
How loved, how honoured once, avails thee not,
To whom related, or by whom begot;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee;
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be!
Poets themselves must fall like those they sung,
Deaf the praised ear, and mute the tuneful tongue.
Ev'n he, whose soul now melts in mournful lays,
Shall shortly want the generous tear he pays;
Then from his closing eyes thy form shall part,
And the last pang shall tear thee from his heart,
Life's idle business at one gasp be o'er,
The Muse forgot, and thou beloved no more!"

'Eloisa to Abelard' is a more successful effort of Pope to move the mind by pathos. His latest editor gives him credit for a certain tenderness of heart which enabled him to enter into the feelings of Eloisa, and he observes very justly—

"The 'Rape of the Lock,' and the Epistle to Eloisa stand alone in Pope's works. He produced nothing else which resembled them. They have the merit of being master-pieces in opposite styles. The first is remarkable for its delicious fancy and sportive satire; the second for its fervid passion and tender melancholy. Two poems of such rare and such different excellence would alone entitle Pope to his fame."

Bowles, who is generally called, and justly called the most poetical of the Pope editors, considers that 'Eloisa to Abelard,' which he terms a "transcendent poem," is "infinitely superior to everything of the



kind, ancient or modern." Johnson, equally eulogistic, terms it one of the most happy productions of human wit; and Warton, in words fruitful of discussion, declares his conviction that "the reputation of Pope as a poet among posterity will be principally owing to his 'Windsor Forest,' his 'Rape of the Lock,' and his 'Eloisa to Abelard.'" All the critics, except Roscoe, whose opinion is worthless, object to the immoral tendency of the poem, but Mr. Elwin observes that Pope does not exaggerate the grossness which he found in the Latin letters, and that the censure to which he lies open is not for deviating from his text, but for following it too faithfully. The versification of the Epistle is of unrivalled sweetness, and it is easy to credit the story that Porson, whether drunk or sober, would recite, or rather sing, the poem from beginning to end. It seems strange that Mr. Elwin should consider the poetical merit of the piece diminished from the fact that Pope found his materials in the Latin letters. Have not some of Shakespeare's critics made a similar accusation, because the great dramatist, instead of inventing the plots of his finest plays, was content to make use of those that lay ready to his hands? It is true that Pope followed the letters in his wonderful epistle, but the singular beauty of form in which he



has clothed the details is a higher mark of genius than if he had invented them. He has made what was perishable, immortal.

By many critics the 'Dunciad' is regarded as Pope's greatest effort. This was the opinion of De Quincey, and is apparently the judgment of Mr. Ruskin, who terms it, as we have already observed,* "the most absolutely chiselled and monumental work 'exacted' in our country." We cannot agree with this view of what no doubt is a masterly production, full of wit, full of power, full, as Mr. Ward has pointed out, of scathing invectives. But the dunces are poor game after all, and scarcely worth the toil and subtle skill bestowed upon them. Pope ought never to have soiled his hands with the dirt of Grub Street, least of all did it become him to place himself on an equality with the meanest of his opponents by unjust satire and by ignoble revenge. Moreover, sneers at the profession of literature and at the poverty which is frequently its reward, come with a singularly ill grace from Pope.

"If," says Mr. Pattison, "we condemn the unsuccessful author for the indulgence of a jealousy which it is hard for human nature to stifle, what shall we say of the successful man who retaliates upon his yet struggling fellows, insults their misery, and tramples on them because he has been fortunate enough to emerge? The

* Page 5.



literary value of the productions of Grub Street may have been little enough, but their authors as men were as good and honest men as Pope himself. It is the business of criticism to condemn a bad book. Pope's taste might have been usefully employed, like Boileau's, in signalising pretentious poetry and exposing ambitious incapacity. But Pope was not content with censuring the books, he attacked their authors. Nor was this mistake enough. He fell furiously upon the trade of authorship, treated poverty as a vice, and descends even to contrast his own 'poet's dignity and ease' with the raggedness and dinnerlessness of the sons of rhyme. . . . Pope may have caught this tone towards professional authors from his friend the Dean. But he had not Swift's justification; for Swift never derived any pecuniary profit from his writings. In Pope it was the more unpardonable, because it was in great part to literary manufacture—to his English Homer—that he owed his own comfortable home." *

This, it may be said, is a moral defect of the writer, and does not necessarily diminish the literary excellence of his work. No doubt in certain departments of literature, as in science, men of perverted and ignoble natures may achieve great successes. A man may be a good mathematician and a bad husband; he may beat his wife or starve his children and yet write admirably well upon logic or perspective; but a poet's nature is expressed to a large extent in his poetry, and if he be spiteful, or mean, or jealous among his fellows, some traces of these vices will be discovered in his works. The satirist especially, if he have petty aims and ignoble grudges, is

* Clarendon Press Series. Pope. Satires and Epistles. Introductory, p. 13. Edited by Mark Pattison, B.D. Oxford.

certain to give expression to them, and to mistake private animosities for a regard of public virtue. This is Pope's fault throughout his satires, and it is especially his fault in the 'Dunciad.' But this is not the sole error that detracts from the merit of that satire. Like all works produced for a temporary purpose, its interest has diminished with the lapse of time. To understand the 'Dunciad' thoroughly we are forced to wade through a vast number of notes, and to read as much prose as verse. We must learn all about the men whom Pope puts into his pillory, and as most of them are but poor fellows of Grub Street notoriety, this is a sorry business. We are pulled up at almost every line by some peddling difficulty, which scarcely repays the trouble it demands, and although the way is brightened here and there by inimitable flashes of wit, and by couplets that stand out like landmarks on the highways of English poetry, it is for the most part with painful steps that we travel wearily through the poem. But the toil is well-nigh forgotten in the splendid burst of poetical rhetoric with which the satire concludes. It seems a folly to quote what everybody should know, and yet, because Pope's fame is fixed and his place among the immortals acknowledged, it is probable there may be readers who

accept the general verdict without much acquaintance with his works at first hand. The universal sway and triumph of Dulness are thus commemorated:

"She comes! she comes! the sable throne behold
Of Night primeval and of Chaos old!
Before her Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
And all its varying rainbows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops and in a flash expires.
As one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
The sickening stars fade off th' ethereal plain;
As Argus' eyes, by Hermes' wand opprest,
Close one by one to everlasting rest;
Thus, at her fell approach and secret might,
Art after Art goes out, and all is night.
See skulking Truth to her own cavern fled,
Mountains of casuistry heaped o'er her head!
Philosophy that leaned on Heaven before,
Shrinks to her second cause and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense!
See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave and die.
Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall,
And universal Darkness buries all."*

* The sound of these noble lines, which are likened by Mr. Thackeray to a silver trumpet "ringing defiance to falsehood and tyranny, deceit, dulness, and superstition," must have been in

Pope is, we think, seen at his best and puts forth his greatest strength in the Satires and Epistles of Horace. They show how thoroughly in one direction he appreciated the genius of the great Roman poet, and how admirably he was able to use it without being overmastered by it. Truly does Mr. Pattison say that these 'Imitations' are among the most original of his writings, and they are assuredly the most interesting. If the verse that will bear to be read the oftenest may be accounted the best (a rule

Mr. Austin's ear when he penned the last page and finest portion of his poem 'The Golden Age.' His lines read as if the spirit of Pope had inspired the poetical ardour of his disciple. The poet has been lamenting our greed of money and political pusillanimity, and hints at the possibility of Britain, oppressed with the weight of her gold, falling into the hands of barbarians. Pity that the first couplet is marred by a false rhyme.

"Perish the thought! O, rather let me see
Conspiring myriads bristling on the sea,
Our tranquil coasts bewildered by alarms,
And Britain, singly, face a world in arms!
What if a treacherous Heaven befriend our foes?
Let us go down in glory, as we rose!
And if that doom—the best that could betide—
Be to our Fame by envious Fate denied,
Then come, primeval clouds and seasons frore,
And wrap in gloom our luckless land once more!
Come, every wind of Heaven that rudely blows,
Plunge back our Isle in never-ending snows!
Rage, Eurus, rage! fierce Boreas descend!
With glacial mists lost Albion befriend!
E'en of its name be every trace destroyed,
And Dark sit brooding o'er the formless Void!"

not without exceptions, and dependent in no small measure upon the capacity of the reader), then does Pope merit the highest praise for these masterly productions. Here we have the satirist's finest wit, his most graceful versification, many of his most familiar sayings, some of his sharpest stings. Nowhere in his works does he display such power, such skill in praising a friend and in annihilating a foe. He stabs a reputation or confers one with a word. To be praised by Pope as Arbuthnot, Bolingbroke, Gay, and Bethel are praised in these satires, is to secure a literary immortality; to be laughed at by him is to be laughed at by the world for evermore. The earnestness of the poet is conspicuous throughout, and, we must add, his spite. He does not play with his weapon or merely menace his enemy; but thrusts at him with all his strength. His sincerity is not that of a great moralist, but of a great hater; he shoots with poisoned arrows, and the slightest wound he inflicts is mortal. "He knowingly threw away fame to indulge his piques," says Mr. Pattison; and yet so dear to him was the art he sneers at as an idle trade, that one cannot help suspecting he would have flung a friend aside to save a couplet. In the Prologue Pope declares that he "thought a lie in verse or prose the same," and so in one sense

he did, for he was equally indifferent to both. Yet there is generally truth enough in his satires to give them point. His character of Addison, for instance, false in the main, is not without sufficient veracity in the details to give it currency; and if Dennis, Theobald, Gildon, and others, got more than they deserved, they were fair game for Pope, and could scarcely complain with reason because he hitched them into his rhymes. In these epistles, as in the 'Dunciad,' Pope is sometimes absolutely unjust. To class Burnet with such men as Oldmixon and Cooke was to disgrace himself more than the bishop; to sneer at "slashing Bentley" was to betray his own ignorance. Satire, to carry weight, must have at least some foundation in truth, and not even Pope's consummate art can damage the reputation of a sincere evangelist like Whitefield, or of a man of genius like Defoe. Defects such as these must be deplored; but they are well-nigh forgotten in the blaze of genius that illuminates these satires, and there is tenderness as well as brilliancy, which may be deemed all the more precious because exhibited so rarely. Beautiful are Pope's references to the life and death of his father, to his mother's reposing age, to the medical skill of Arbuthnot, to life's "instant business," to the friends whom he loved

and honoured. Effusions such as these serve to soften down the severity and personality of the satire; they draw us towards the writer, and create that sympathy which is an infinitely higher tribute to the poet than the cold award of admiration. Moreover, the knowledge of the period to be gained from these poems can scarcely be over-estimated. To study them thoroughly is to study the age of which Pope was the first literary representative. He stands, in Mr. Pattison's judgment, as a landmark in the literary and social history of England, and he observes in his admirable introduction to the Satires and Epistles:

"There has accumulated round Pope's poems a mass of biographical anecdote such as surrounds the writings of no other English author. The student of our literature will find that his enjoyment of the wit of the Satires and Epistles is increased exactly in proportion as he extends his knowledge of the period."

There is also another purpose to be served, one of no slight importance in our time, by a careful study of Pope. That poetry is an art will be universally accepted as a truism; but much of our recent verse that has attained a large share of popularity is composed by men who are not artists. They say what they feel without considering what is fitting to be said; they lack the sense of proportion, of con-

gruity, of that harmony which may be regarded as the keystone to all artistic work. Creative power, the immeasurable, incomprehensible faculty that enables a poet to attain the highest heaven of invention is the greatest of poetical gifts; but it is not all that is needed, and the poet who, conscious that he is divinely endowed, would achieve a lasting place in literature, will find that although his most precious possession be a gift neither to be bought with money nor won by study, yet that his belief in his inspiration will fail him unless he add thereto the patient labour exacted from the artist. This is the great merit of Pope, and this is one reason why his works are so invaluable to the student of English literature.

DANIEL DEFOE.

DANIEL DEFOE, one of the most popular of English authors, and probably the most voluminous writer in the language, is to many readers little better than a name. They are familiar with 'Robinson Crusoe,' with the 'History of the Plague,' and with 'Mrs. Veal's Apparition'; they know, because Pope has told them, that Defoe stood in the pillory; and they know also, because Hume has told them, that he was a party-writer; doubtless they know, too, that he was a Dissenter, in an age when dissent was unpopular; and that, after a laborious and troubled life, he was buried in the famous burial-ground consecrated to dissenting dust in Bunhill Fields. These facts, with, perhaps, half-a-dozen more, comprise, we venture to say, the popular knowledge of Defoe. Compared with Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday, he is but the shadow of a shade. The novelist's immortal tale, translated into all languages that can boast a literature, is a household book throughout the world, while the author himself is for



the most part neglected and unknown. The more we consider this anomaly, the stranger does it appear.

Defoe lived and did the best part of his life's work in one of the most celebrated periods of our literary history. He was the contemporary of Swift and Addison, of Pope and Prior, of Atterbury and Gay. When Steele was writing his delightful 'Tatler,' and when the 'Spectator' was winning a place upon every breakfast-table, Defoe was the busiest, and perhaps the most prominent of journalists. He commenced his 'Review' in 1704, five years before the 'Tatler,' and brought it to a conclusion in 1713, one year before the last volume of the 'Spectator.' In 1704, when Steele wrote his 'Lying Lover,' Defoe produced nearly twenty separate publications, as well as several new editions of his earlier writings; in 1727, when Gay electrified the town with his 'Beggar's Opera,' and Swift had astonished the nation with 'Gulliver's Travels,' the indefatigable Defoe was still busy as ever at his trade of author. It may be useful to add that Addison, who was born eleven years later than Defoe, died two months after the appearance of 'Robinson Crusoe,' in 1719; that Prior and Defoe were young men together; that Congreve, who was by several years Defoe's junior, died before him; that Gay, born more than a quarter of a century

after the novelist, outlived him scarcely a year; and that Francis Atterbury and Defoe may be said to have commenced life and closed it together.

With these facts before us—and many of a like bearing might be added—it is certainly curious that when we speak of the Queen Anne men we never think of Defoe; and that historians of acknowledged reputation, in recording the literary or political history of that period, either omit his name from their pages or allude to it with indifference. Defoe was on confidential terms with King William, yet he does not figure in Lord Macaulay's 'History of England'; he was employed by Queen Anne on important missions, and took no mean part in the negotiations which preceded the union with Scotland, yet he is unnoticed by Earl Stanhope in his 'History of England,' and but slightly noticed in his 'History of the Reign of Queen Anne.' Hume alludes to him as "a scurrilous party-writer in very little reputation;" and Dr. Johnson, whose father was a country bookseller, and who in early life was forced to gain his own bread by almost servile employments, is generous enough to allow a large share of merit to a man "who, bred a tradesman, had written so variously and so well." Defoe has been well termed the father of English novelists, and his great successor,



Richardson, studied his style of composition with no little assiduity; yet all Richardson has to say in his favour is, that he was "an ingenious gentleman, though a dissenter." Next to Swift, Defoe was the ablest political writer of the day, yet Swift refers to him as "the fellow that was pilloried, I forget his name;" and Pope imitates the sneer of his friend in coupling Defoe with Tutchin:

> "Earless on high stood unabashed Defoe,
> And Tutchin flagrant from the scourge below."*

It is worth noting also that while the 'Examiner,' in which the Dean displayed his vigour as a journalist, is included in his works, the 'Review'—a paper every whit as able, and curiously characteristic of Defoe's genius—has never been reprinted. Gay damned him with faint praise as a fellow who had excellent natural parts, but whose writings

* It is scarcely necessary to say that this is a false statement. Defoe was pilloried, and turned the laugh upon his persecutors by his 'Hymn to the Pillory,' which was circulated amongst the crowd that surrounded the platform, who, he tells us, "expressed their affections by loud shouts and acclamations" when he was taken down; but he never lost his ears. The Hymn contains some telling passages, and was appreciated by the populace. The following bold lines are well known:

> "Tell them the men that placed him here
> Are scandals to the times;
> Are at a loss to find his guilt,
> And can't commit his crimes."

would endure but one skimming; while wiser men than Gay, better men than Swift or Pope, passed him by in silence.*

Again, it is remarkable that, although Defoe lived in an age of literary gossip, and was continually engaging the attention of the public, the facts preserved with regard to his personal career are few and comparatively unimportant. We know more of what he did than of what he was; a great deal more of his literary occupations, imperfect as our knowledge of them is, than of his home life. Pope and Swift, Addison and Steele, are almost as familiar to us as the men of letters of our own century. We know nearly as much about Pope as about Coleridge, as much, perhaps, of Addison as of Wordsworth, and the story of Sir Richard Steele can be read by us as clearly as if the innumerable notelets and messages addressed to his "dearest Prue" had been despatched in the era of the penny post, of railroads and telegraphs. On the other hand, we know so little of Defoe, apart from the productions of his versatile genius, that Mr. Henry Kingsley, in writing an admirable preface to the Globe edition of 'Robinson Crusoe,' was reduced to the conclusion "that this

* The 'Review' has a literary importance which is independent of its intrinsic merit, for in it may be found, as Mr. Forster has pointed out, the germ of future 'Tatlers' and 'Spectators.'



wondrous romance is no romance at all, but a merely allegorical account of Defoe's own life for twenty-eight years."

This ignorance, be it remarked, is not owing to any lack of industry on the part of biographers. Several lives of Defoe have been written, and of these Mr. Walter Wilson's 'Memoir,' published in three bulky volumes about forty years ago, is undoubtedly the best that we possess. It is an honest, manly work, written without pretension, and with great knowledge and care—a trustworthy and respectable work, but it is impossible to agree with Mr. Kingsley's assertion that it is a splendid piece of standard biography. The writer deserves infinite credit for his painstaking toil, but his memoir is better adapted for service than for delight. The wheat itself is safely garnered, but the golden beauty of the field has disappeared before the hand of the reaper.

Mr. Lee's more recently published 'Life'* came before the world with considerable pretensions. Some years ago, as our readers may remember, the discovery of six letters of Defoe in the State Paper Office, threw a new light upon the biography of the writer, and proved that his career as a

* 'Daniel Defoe: His Life and recently discovered Writings, extending from 1716 to 1729,' by William Lee. 3 vols. Hotten, 1869.

journalist was prolonged far beyond the period commonly supposed. Chalmers and Wilson had told us upon what seemed to be good ground, that Defoe's political labours ceased in the year 1715, and that after that date, having suffered meanwhile from an apoplectic seizure, he devoted his energies to the works which have made his name immortal. The six letters show that this statement was an error, and that Defoe's work in the newspapers of the day had not ceased in 1718. They show also that Defoe's conduct was by no means so honourable as had been previously supposed, and readers who cherish a high admiration of this famous writer might be almost tempted to wish that so unfortunate a page of his history had never seen the light. The reasons given by Mr. Lee for a new biography of his hero, will be found in the following extract:

"The unanimous concurrence of all his previous biographers, in the dictum that his political life terminated in 1715; the accidental reappearance of his six letters in the State Paper Office, and the investigation to which they led; the exhumation of this large collection of his journalistic writings, between the years 1716 and 1731; the discovery (guided by the fact of his continued political life) that he was the author of many pamphlets and works not heretofore known to be his; and that he was not the author of many works that have been attributed to him; the rectification of the chronology of his works; the consequent alteration, in sequence, of the events of his life; the impossibility of interweaving all these circumstances with



the extracts forming the body of this work; the previous misconception as to the moderate and conservative part of Defoe's character; and, moreover, the fact that his writings contained in this publication will be entirely new to the public,—all conducted to the necessity of re-writing the memoirs of his life."

It will be seen from this brief statement that Mr. Lee considers he had sound reasons for undertaking a new Memoir of Defoe; and when we add that the writer has discovered, or thinks he has discovered, that Defoe was a Conservative, and from first to last "a sincere, consistent upholder of the Church of England, its establishment, and its doctrines, though a dissenter from its forms of worship," it is evident that he breaks new ground with regard to the biography, and is something better than a mere book-maker. In Mr. Lee's eyes the faults of Defoe are virtues; and despite the discovery of the six letters, Mr. Lee holds to the belief that Defoe's conduct, while acting as a spy for the Government, was upright and consistent, since he has been unable to discover "any condition or stipulation, direct or implied, that he should ever write a word contrary to his conscience or to the principles which had directed his whole life; nor," he adds naïvely, "have I found that he ever did so!"

For some years Defoe received the pay of the Government for secret services. He worked for



Harley at the time when that Minister had drifted into Toryism, and was supported by Swift. When Harley was superseded he worked for his enemy Godolphin. What were the services he rendered to these Ministers we do not know, and are therefore bound to believe them honourable; although it is difficult to see how Defoe, a Dissenter and a Whig, could have acted in conjunction with Harley, who was a persecutor of the sectaries, in heart a Tory and in practice a Trimmer. It is possible that the connection was creditable to all the persons concerned; but the employment of Defoe by the Government, during the ministry of Lord Townshend, was distinctly the reverse. According to Mr. Lee's own statement that nobleman proposed, in 1715, "that Defoe should be taken into the service of the Government, but that the world should not be informed of the fact, and still consider him under displeasure, and separated from the Whigs." This statement is borne out by passages in the recently discovered letters. From these it appears that, by the desire of the Government, Defoe took shares in Tory papers, wrote articles for them, and undertook an editorial supervision, with the deliberate purpose of defeating the aims of the party to which, professedly, he was



allied, and of the proprietors with whom he was in partnership. Thus, of one journal he writes, that though the property was not wholly his own—

"Yet the conduct and government of the style and views was so entirely in me that I ventured to assure his lordship the sting of that mischievous paper should be entirely taken out, though it was granted that the style should continue Tory, as it was, that the party might be amused, and not set up another, which would have destroyed the design."

And of another:

"I introduced myself in the disguise of a translator of the foreign news, to be so far concerned in this weekly paper of Mist's as to be able to keep it within the circle of a secret management, and also prevent the mischievous part of it; and yet neither Mist, nor any of those concerned with him, have the least guess or suspicion by whose direction I do it."

And then, in language which is perfectly unmistakable, he sums up, as follows, the shabby part he was playing:

"By this management the weekly 'Journal' and 'Dormer's Letter,' as also the 'Mercurius Politicus,' which is in the same nature of management as the 'Journal,' will be always kept (mistakes excepted) to pass as Tory papers, and yet be disabled and enervated so as to do no mischief or give any offence to the Government. . . . I am, sir, for this service, posted among Papists, Jacobites, and enraged High Tories, a generation who, I profess, my very soul abhors; I am obliged to hear traitorous expressions and outrageous words against his Majesty's person and government, and his most faithful servants, and smile at it all as if I approved it. I am obliged to take all the scandalous and, indeed, villainous papers that come, and keep them by me



as if I would gather materials from them to put them into the News; nay, I often venture to let things pass which are a little shocking, that I may not render myself suspected. Thus I bow in the House of Rimmon."

By what casuistry Defoe reconciled such conduct to his conscience it is impossible to say. In his earlier days his stern integrity and blunt out-spokenness had thrown him ever and again into a sea of troubles, for no sooner did he escape from the waves, than some courageous utterance or some clever piece of irony which his enemies could not understand, caused him to be turned adrift once more.

Defoe's father was a Presbyterian, and to the same form of religious faith the son adhered through life. But in his political as well as in his religious creed he appears to have stood alone. The Whigs abused him, the Dissenters suspected him. He wrote in favour of the Hanoverian succession, and was accused of being a Jacobite; he endeavoured to serve the nonconformists by a pamphlet, the wit of which passed their apprehension, and was first placed in the pillory, and afterwards thrust into prison for his pains.

When Dissenters practised occasional conformity for the sake of worldly position, Defoe denounced them in no measured language; when Churchmen acted with intolerance towards Dissenters, no infre-



quent occurrence in an age when the name of Sacheverell was coupled with the Church, Defoe boldly maintained the freedom of religious opinion, and asserted that the violence of the High Church party was every day driving ecclesiastical sheep into dissenting pastures. So severe, indeed, was his honesty that he pleased nobody; he aimed his blows in every direction, indifferent whether at friend or foe, so long as he could strike at abuses in the State and in the Church. Controversy was his delight, and for the sake of it he made large pecuniary sacrifices and endured the most painful privations. Thirteen times, he relates, he had been rich and poor. The Grub Street hacks of the day bespattered him with Billingsgate; the men of letters abused him after their fashion, which was only a trifle less scurrilous; and according to his own statement, made in proof of his integrity, he lived under universal contempt.

Before Defoe became a novelist he had written more than 160 distinct volumes or pamphlets. As a trader his own business affairs were frequently out of order; but whether he was in hiding at Bristol, or standing in the pillory in Cornhill, Cheapside, or at Temple Bar, or suffering in the filthy dens of Newgate, which he afterwards described so forcibly in 'Moll Flanders,' his ready wit never deserted him,

nor did he ever lose his courage or his interest in public affairs.

Writing in 1712, he says:

"I'll do and say what I think is a debt to justice and truth without the least regard to clamour and reproach. . . . In the school of affliction I have learnt more philosophy than at the academy, and more divinity than from the pulpit; in prison I have learnt to know that liberty does not consist in open doors and the free egress and regress of locomotion. I have seen the rough side of the world as well as the smooth; and have in less than half a year tasted the difference between the closet of a king and the dungeon of Newgate. . . . And now I live under universal contempt, which contempt I have learnt to contemn, and have an uninterrupted joy in my soul; not at my being contemned, but that no crime can be laid to my charge to make that contempt my due."

And then, after recounting the difficulties under which he laboured from an insupportable weight of debt and from having to maintain a wife and six children, he adds:

"Under all these circumstances, and many more too long to write, my only happiness is this: I have always been kept cheerful, easy, and quiet, enjoying a perfect calm of mind, clearness of thought, and satisfaction not to be broken in upon by whatever may happen to me. If any man ask me how I arrived to it, I answer him in short, by a constant serious application to the great, solemn, and weighty work of resignation to the will of Heaven, by which let no man think I presume."

These are brave words, and harmonize with the divine philosophy which breathes through every



chapter of 'Robinson Crusoe.' In the paper from which we have quoted, Defoe says, "I have been fed more by miracle than Elijah when the ravens were his purveyors," and so he makes Crusoe declare upon his solitary island:

"I ought to consider I had been fed even by miracle, even as great as that of feeding Elijah by ravens. . . . In a word, as my life was a life of sorrow one way, it was a life of mercy another; and I wanted nothing to make it a life of comfort, but to be able to make my sense of God's goodness to me and care over me in this condition be my daily consolation; and after I did make a just improvement of these things I went away and was no more sad."

Brave words again, and uttered—it were a shame to doubt it—from the heart of the writer. Yet it is passing strange to note, and we shall not attempt to reconcile the contradiction that the first passage was written a few years before Defoe "bowed in the House of Rimmon," and the latter at the very time when he was engaged in a course of systematic deception. Even Mr. Lee acknowledges that Defoe's position was a questionable one, and states that the secret service rendered by him to the Government is—

"The key to the reproaches and calumnies that continued to be heaped upon him, to the silence with which he bore insult and scandal without deserving it, and to the anonymous publication and non-recognition by himself, subsequently, of even his most celebrated works."

Yet Mr. Lee is not prepared to allow that this ignoble employment lowers Defoe's character for integrity, consistency, and independence.

From his early youth, Defoe was a politician and a journalist, and it is curious to observe how often this many-sided man, with his suppleness of intellect, his broad tolerance and independent thought, advocated the views and started in the tracks with which the present age is familiar. He anticipated recent discoveries, suggested what we are wont to regard as modern theories, battled bravely for truths which are even now but partially established, evinced a power of grasping details as well as principles, and displayed that practical sagacity which we are sometimes foolish enough to regard as a national characteristic.

Mr. Lee observes that Defoe was the first advocate of free trade, and points out that the chief supporters of the principle were Tories, while the Whigs argued for protection and prohibition. He denounced begging as strongly as Archbishop Whately, and on the same grounds; he demanded entire freedom of the press; he pointed out the evils of the slave trade long before the national conscience had revolted against it; he proposed the foundation of a University in London, of an hospital



for foundlings, and of an academy of music; he suggested plans for diminishing the evils of prostitution, and a plan for the proper management of the insane. Like Steele he had once in his life been forced to fight a duel, and like Steele he pronounced duelling a folly and a sin. He wrote against the multiplication of unnecessary oaths; he advocated, as he well might, prison reform; he suggested means for the prevention of street robberies; he argued for the importance of a standing army, and for the necessity of giving a liberal education to women.

"I would have men take women for companions" he said, "and educate them to be fit for it," and he adds, "I cannot think that God ever made them so delicate, so glorious creatures, and furnished them with such charms, so agreeable and delightful to mankind, with souls capable of the same enjoyments as men, and all to be only stewards of our houses, cooks, and slaves."

In an age when toleration was so little understood that a law was passed preventing Dissenters from acting as schoolmasters—when printers were hanged for printing treasonable pamphlets—when the frank expression of opinion led to the pillory, to confiscation, and to Newgate—Defoe, fearless and unabashed, as he is justly termed in the 'Dunciad,' advocated the right of private judgment and the broadest toleration of all forms of religious belief. In an age

when fashionable vices were mistaken for virtues; when Dean Swift was on friendly terms with Mrs. Manley; when the Countess of Suffolk was courted by the wits; when Cabinet Ministers got drunk as a matter of course; when bribes were openly offered and accepted, and Sir Robert Walpole declared, "I know the price of every man in the Lords except three;" when many of the clergy frequented alehouses and taverns, or spent their time in hunting after preferment; when even the dull, respectable court of the good-natured Queen Anne was sometimes notorious for its orgies; and when, as Mr. Lee observes, the grossest vice was exhibited openly;—Defoe, true-born Englishman as he was, spoke out boldly against the follies and sins of the time. His language on such occasions is rarely polite, but it is always vigorous, although not always just. Sometimes, too, he falls into a fault he would have been the first to condemn in others, and apes the flatterer —an office that seems strangely at variance with his rough-grained democratic nature. In spite of King William's connection with Lady Orkney, Defoe declares that "he was a prince of the greatest piety, sincerity, and unfeigned religion either history relates or memory informs of in the world." Of Prince George of Denmark, who, according to



Macaulay, was hardly an accountable being, and of whom Charles II. said, "I have tried Prince George sober and I have tried him drunk; and, drunk or sober, there is nothing in him," Defoe writes in the most extravagant strain of eulogy, terming him a great and good man, whose sedateness of judgment and consummate prudence commanded respect from the whole nation. Of Queen Anne, who, according to the courtier-preachers of the age, was endowed with transcendent virtues, Defoe sings, in something slightly better than his wonted doggerel:

"Our Church established and our trade restored,
Our friends protected and our peace secured,
France humbled, and our fleets insulting Spain,—
These are the triumphs of a female reign.
At home, her milder influence she imparts,
Queen of our souls and monarch of our hearts;
If change of sexes thus will change our scenes,
Grant, Heaven, we always may be ruled by queens!"

And of George I., a selfish libertine, who cared infinitely more for his German mistresses and cooks than for the welfare of his kingdom, Defoe writes:

"His person is comely and grave, his countenance has majesty and sweetness so mixt that nothing can be better suited to the throne of a king. . . . His temper is goodness itself, inexpressibly obliging, to the last degree courteous and kind, yet not lowered beneath the dignity of his birth. He is steady in council, sedate in resolving, vigorous in executing, brave and gallant in the field, wise and politick in the camp, enterprising



in the matter of action, and yet of so calm a courage that he who dares do anything that is fit to do, can never be in danger of precipitating into what is impracticable to be done. In short, if it may be said of any man in Europe, it may be said of his Majesty, that he is born for council and fitted to command the world."

This flattery of monarchs was carried so far in that day as to reach, in many cases, to sheer blasphemy. Few writers of the century are without traces of the complaint, and, compared with some of his contemporaries, Defoe may be said to have had it in a mild form.

In spite of this folly, which belonged rather to the time than to the man, Defoe in the earlier part of his career seems to have acted with consummate honesty. King William was attracted by the 'True-born Englishman," and Defoe received some favours from the monarch in consequence. Yet his intercourse with the king was no restraint to his pen, and he wrote in opposition to the war with France a piece characterized by Mr. Henry Kingsley as headlong radicalism with a vengeance. If Defoe as a politician did not shrink from offending the best friend he ever had, he was equally ready as a polemic to attack the most illustrious members of the sect to which he owned allegiance. Among his pamphlets is one entitled,

'An Enquiry into the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters in Cases of Preferment,' the original editions of which attracted little attention. Three years after its publication, Sir Thomas Abney, a distinguished Dissenter, whose name is linked, in modern ears, to the melancholy associations of a cemetery, was appointed Lord Mayor of London. He was a member of a Dissenting congregation at Newington, which "sat under" the Rev. John Howe, *clarum et venerabile nomen!* a divine of vast acquirements and transcendent virtues. Howe, of whom, by the way, Mr. Kingsley seems to know nothing, since he merely writes of him as a man of Defoe's own party, and spells his name incorrectly,* was as learned as he was holy, as pure in morals as he was elevated in thought.† Perhaps the most marked

* 'Robinson Crusoe,' Globe edition. See Preface, p. xv.

† Howe's biography has been admirably written, and his works edited, by Professor Henry Rogers, who has done justice to the catholicity of his principles and to the lofty thought which dignifies his writings. Had Howe's style of composition corresponded with the breadth and depth of his intellect, he would have ranked with our foremost divines, with Hooker and Barrow, with Taylor and Butler. Unfortunately, he knows better what to say than how to say it, and his cumbersome and intricate paragraphs frequently demand more patience from the reader than he is likely to give; yet he will be well repaid for his labour, and especially in the perusal of Howe's two principal works, 'The Blessedness of the Righteous' and 'The Living Temple.'

feature of his character was his regard for toleration. He loved broad principles better than the dogmas of party, and was too good a Christian to be a good sectary. On the preferment of Sir Thomas Abney, to which we have alluded, Defoe published a new edition of his 'Enquiry,' with a preface addressed to Howe, "as you," he says, "have more immediate relations to our present Lord Mayor, who is, or has been, a member of the Church of Christ under your charge;" and he asks Howe "to declare to the world, whether the practice of alternate communion be allowed either by your congregation in particular, or by the Dissenters in general." Here then was a challenge and an accusation; the challenge demanding that Howe, as "one of the most learned and judicious of the Dissenting ministry," should either defend the practice of occasional conformity, or disown it; the accusation denouncing, though not openly, the conduct of a worthy magistrate as one who had practised occasional conformity, and done so for the sake of preferment. Defoe's argument may be summed up in the following aphorism. Nothing can be lawful and unlawful at the same time; to say that a man can be of two religions is a contradiction; if conformity be allowable, schism is a sin. "If it be not lawful for me to dissent, I ought



to conform; but if it be unlawful for me to conform, I must dissent."

In this essay, which is written with great vigour and felicity of diction, Defoe contrived to give a plausible appearance to a preposterous argument. He takes the side of the High Church party when he asserts that schism is a sin, and he sides with an insignificant section of narrow-minded fanatics when he speaks of the Churchman and Dissenter as holding separate creeds, and being, as he broadly puts it, of "two religions." Howe's reply to the pamphlet is written in a loose, verbose style; he strides with lumbering paces over ground which he need not have touched, and reaches his goal by a painfully circuitous route. Defoe, who knew well how to make the best of a bad argument, replied, in his crisp, decisive manner to Howe's long-winded treatise. One or two of his remarks are very telling, as when he asks his opponent who, as a Dissenting minister, maintained a schism in the Established Church, whether he did right in being so indifferent as to boast that he never persuaded any man to conform or not to conform. "I am sure," he says, "if I was arrived to that coldness in the matter myself, I would conform immediately." But the most sig-

nificant passage in the letter will be found, as is often the case, in the postscript:

"Besides your book, sir, which I think treats me coarsely enough, I am since threatened to be worse used by a gentleman who thinks himself concerned in my affronting you, as he calls it. I assure you, sir, I do not charge you with any part of it; I believe you to be more of a Christian and more of a gentleman, nor am I sensible I gave you any affront; I am sure I intended you none. But because that gentleman, I understand, expects some answer this way, I have this to say to him, that if he thinks himself capable to give me personal correction, he knows me well enough, and need never want an opportunity to be welcome."

What a curious conclusion to a semi-religious controversy!

Had Defoe lived no longer than Shakespeare, he would have been unknown to the world as a great imaginative writer. His reputation, if it had survived, would have rested on his achievements as a journalist and on his sufferings in the cause of political freedom. He called himself a poet, indeed, and the assumption was scarcely arrogant in an age when Nahum Tate was laureate; but, richly endowed though he was in other ways, when he attempted to put on his singing robes he presented a sorry figure. Only a few familiar couplets are likely to survive the wreck of Defoe's verses.



It was as an old man—for a man so buffeted with the storms of fortune may be reckoned old at fifty-nine—and it was, as we have said, after a fit of apoplexy that Defoe produced his unrivalled story. Like Richardson, he won his fame at a period when, in most men, the imaginative faculty becomes dormant. Defoe was in his staid Dutch fashion a consummate literary artist. There have been greater novelists, but not one, we think, who has shown more skill in the management of his materials, or produced so fine an effect from the accumulation of prosaic details. 'Robinson Crusoe' became famous immediately, has been famous ever since, and is likely to continue popular so long as literature endures. In this tale, the fruit of a life's experience and of accumulated stores of knowledge, Defoe exhibits an intense imagination which at times leads him to the verge of poetry. All his fictions display an infinite amount of invention, and of practical experience; but the first and best of them is perhaps the only one in which the supreme faculty comes into play, the only one that awakens strong emotion in the reader and carries him, despite the homely, colloquial style of the narrative, into a region of high romance. "Crusoe's lonely isle" has a more familiar hold upon our boys than any historic site with which they are acquainted. Few

spots distinguished in geography have a greater interest than this. It is something to discover an island, but it is better to create one, and Defoe's freehold is more precious, and bids fair to be more permanent than any possessed by duke or marquis. "This man could have founded a colony as well as governed it," said a statesman after reading Defoe's great novel. Dr. Johnson, it will be remembered, said that 'Robinson Crusoe' was one of the few books a reader would wish longer. Marmontel observed that it was the first book he ever read with exquisite pleasure; and Rousseau wrote:

"Since we must have books, this is one which in my opinion is a most excellent treatise on natural education. This is the first my Emilius shall read; his whole library shall long consist of this work."

Similar quotations might of course be multiplied by scores, but a tale that has been accepted by the world needs not the commendation of men of letters. Yet those of us who still rejoice in this book of our boyhood, must have heard or read with no common pleasure, the remarks made some years ago at the banquet of the Royal Geographical Society by one of the most illustrious of our scientific men. Professor Owen, in alluding to "the most popular of all records of geographical discovery and adven-



ture" made by "the adventurous mariner, Robinson Crusoe," said:

"It is unfortunate that lack of instruments for lunar observations prevented the determination of the precise locality of the most celebrated of the islands which he discovered. But when we reflect on the influence of the literary results of his expeditions in stimulating the youth of all nations to geographical exploration and adventure, we may hope in that noble hall, which the prophetic vision of our president doubtless sees rising in the future, that a statue of Crusoe may be raised from the sole remaining authentic portrait which adorns the frontispiece of the first edition of his famous geographical work."

We cannot accept Mr. Henry Kingsley's theory, that "this wondrous romance of 'Robinson Crusoe' is no romance at all, but a merely allegorical account of Defoe's own life for twenty-eight years;" and when he says that there is no doubt at all that by the cannibal Caribbees, Defoe meant the Tories, and that the name of the first savage he killed with his gun was called Sacheverell, we can but smile at the ingenious discovery. It is true indeed that in his 'Serious Reflections' Defoe states the tale is both allegorical and historical, and that "there's not a circumstance in the imaginary story but has its just allusion to a real story, and chimes part for part and step for step with the inimitable life of Robinson Crusoe;" but it must be remembered that in writing thus Defoe was trying to obviate an

objection which some silly critic had raised against the book as wholly fictitious. Moreover, these remarks occur in the preface to another fiction, and in the same preface the writer avers that "the fable is always made for the moral, not the moral for the fable." Accept this statement as literal, and it will not be difficult to accept the former also. But readers of Defoe will remember that one great aim in all his works is to destroy the illusions of romance, and to write as though he were telling in homely language a narrative of ordinary life. His realism is so intense that it has been frequently deceptive, and the produce of a fertile invention has been accepted as a simple record of events.

"Lord Chatham," says Mr. Forster, "thought the Cavalier a real person, and his description of the civil wars the best in the language. Dr. Mead quoted the book upon the Plague as the narrative of an eye-witness; and Dr. Johnson sat up all night over Captain Carleton's Memoirs as a new work of English history he wondered not to have seen before."

It was Defoe's aim in all his tales to encourage this delusion; and just as in the preface to 'Roxana' he declared the work to be a history and not a story; as in the preface to 'Moll Flanders' he observes that "the world is so taken up of late with novels and romances that it will be hard for a private history to be taken for genuine where the names and other

circumstances of the persons are concealed,"—so we believe that in 'Robinson Crusoe' his plan, as a novelist, led him to adopt the same system of innocent deception.

It is evident, no doubt, that in his wisest and most beautiful work, the author records much that he himself had learnt and suffered during a troubled life. In all his fictions, indeed, he identifies himself with his characters; and even his villains—women as well as men—bear a family likeness to their literary father. It seems hard to say this of such characters as Moll Flanders, Roxana, and Colonel Jack; but while committing hateful crimes, and relating what they have done, they moralize upon their evil deeds with the seriousness and sobriety of a sedate old gentleman whose one object in life is the benefit of his fellow-creatures. Yet the descent from the light and purity of the great romance to the oppressive and noxious atmosphere of the minor novels is great indeed. 'Robinson Crusoe' stands out from its companions like a noble mountain amidst a range of stunted hillocks; it is a book so manly in tone, so feminine in sweetness, so Christian in feeling, that it deserves a place on the same shelf with the 'Faery Queene' and the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' But on what shelf, and with what companions, shall we place 'Roxana,' and 'Moll

Flanders,' 'Colonel Jack,' and 'Captain Singleton'? Not certainly with books in which splendid powers are perverted to evil, and vice is tricked out to wear the semblance of virtue; but among books that display, with the fidelity of a photograph, human nature at its worst, vice in all its grossness, and the low aims of low people in all their vulgarity. Love, in the highest meaning of the word, was unknown to Defoe, and is not, therefore, portrayed in his novels. He wrote only of what he knew, and of this he knew nothing. His women are without grace, without purity, without dignity, they are even without passion; and when led astray, are not influenced by their affections, but by a love of greed. Their aims are mercenary, their manners loose, their language commonplace; they are wholly destitute of sentiment and of the charm of poetry. But they act and speak like living beings, instead of moving like puppets. The truth of the likenesses reconciles us to their coarseness. They interest us, because of the one touch of nature, and as specimens of our common humanity.*

* Lord Macaulay, a great devourer of novels, could not tolerate Defoe's, of which he writes with more force than discrimination. If, however, there is much exaggeration, there is also some truth, in the following criticism: "What has Defoe done great except the first part of 'Robinson Crusoe'? The second part is poor in comparison. The 'History of the Plague' and the 'Memoirs of a Cavalier' are in one sense curious works of



Defoe professes to write always with a moral, and even with a religious purpose. He was an honest and severe Presbyterian, who regarded actors as the "sons of hell," and was so thorough a Sabbatarian that he considered the licensing of a certain number of hackney-coaches to ply on Sundays as the worst blemish of King William's reign, and we suppose, therefore, a greater slur upon his memory than the massacre of Glencoe. He had from his youth belonged to a strait sect, and had shown himself willing to suffer persecution for his creed. When his minor fictions were published Defoe was more than sixty years of age, and had just produced one of the wholesomest and most beautiful tales we possess in the language. Is it possible that these far inferior books were written years before, when he was immured in

art. They are wonderfully like true histories; but considered as novels, which they are, there is not much in them. He had undoubtedly a knack of making fiction look like truth. But is such a knack much to be desired? Is it not of the same sort with the knack of a painter who takes in the birds with his fruit? I have seen dead game painted in such a way that I thought the partridges and pheasants real, but surely such pictures do not rank high as works of art? Villemain, and before him, Lord Chatham, were deceived by the 'Memoirs of a Cavalier,' but when those 'Memoirs' are known to be fictitious, what are they worth? How immeasurably inferior to 'Waverley' or the 'Legend of Montrose,' or 'Old Mortality'! As to 'Moll Flanders,' 'Roxana,' and 'Colonel Jack,' they are utterly wretched and nauseous; in no respect that I can see beyond the reach of Afra Behn."—'Life of Lord Macaulay,' vol. ii. p. 454.

Newgate, and when, doubtless, he acquired much of the special knowledge they exhibit, and that the extraordinary popularity of 'Robinson Crusoe,' which gained its high position at a bound, induced him to give them also to the world? It would be a satisfaction to think that such novels as 'Moll Flanders' and 'Roxana' were not among the last works of an old man. His aim, it may be admitted, was to portray the ugliness of vice and the divine beauty of virtue, and certainly he displays vice after a very undraped fashion. If people don't dislike it, he says, it is their own fault; and their fault too, if they do not gain instruction from the inevitable moral which follows the representation. But the first object of fiction is amusement; and this, in the novels we are speaking of, can be gathered only from the vicious or criminal adventures of the characters described. Books such as these are not taken up for the sake of instruction. It is impossible, therefore, to accept Defoe's asseverations that his sole object in writing his fictions was didactic, and we agree with the biographers of the novelist, that they cannot be recommended for indiscriminate perusal.

Of Defoe the man—apart from Defoe the politician, the polemic, the social reformer, and the novelist—there is so little to be said that the biographer who

attempts a portrait on a large scale is almost forced to write a history of his times and of his works. The times are interesting, the works manifold, and what with chronicle and criticism, abundant extracts and minute historical details, such a memoir easily swells out into goodly proportions. Still it may be questioned whether the little we know accurately of Defoe is not to some extent obscured by these extraneous details. From the midst of them, however, it is perhaps possible to form a portrait which, at least in its broader features, will be tolerably well defined.

How clear-sighted this man was, what abundant energy he possessed, how willingly he sacrificed private emolument for the public good, with what cheerfulness he turned the most adverse circumstances to practical account, how strong he was in the invincible ardour of an heroic soul—all this is duly set forth in Mr. Lee's 'Biography.' Forget the six fatal letters, and you will acknowledge that a braver specimen of English manhood never walked this island; remembering them sorrowfully, as you needs must, and while perplexed at the unrighteous conduct of a righteous man, you are content to confess you do not understand the inconsistency, and to accept, as compensation, the virtues of a life.

MATTHEW PRIOR.

AMONG the men of letters who have made the reign of the "good Queen Anne" (good perhaps, but dull certainly) so famous in our annals, it is remarkable that Pope alone can be said to have wholly dedicated his life to literature. For him there was no meaning in life apart from poetry, and the noble fame which poetry brought with it. His wretched physical condition and his proscribed creed were dead against him in the race for preferment and popularity. In his body he was one of the feeblest of men, so helpless that he had to be dressed by a servant, so much of a cripple that his enemies, with the gross lack of good feeling frequently displayed in that age, sneered at him as a hunchback. But Pope possessed invincible courage, and knowing well his powers, and seeing that there was but one road open to him, resolved to rise in it above all competitors.

With his poetical contemporaries, on the other hand, literature, although in some cases heartily



appreciated, was used as a means rather than an end. It was the ladder by which they hoped to ascend to competence or fortune, not the goal towards which they directed their most wistful glances. In those days the first rungs of this ladder were frequently climbed by verse-making. Addison, who is probably the only writer that ever gained an official post by a simile, having compared Marlborough's "mighty soul" at Blenheim to an angel who

> "—— pleased th' Almighty's orders to perform
> Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm,"

advanced, a conqueror himself, from one position to another until he reached his highest elevation as Secretary of State; Tickell, who also gained place by his verses, was Under-Secretary, and afterwards Secretary to the Lords Justices of Ireland, a post, says Scott, of "high trust." Steele held three or four offices, and had no one but himself to blame for his pecuniary misfortunes. Congreve, thanks to the 'Old Bachelor,' received from Government an income of twelve hundred a year, and was supposed at least to perform certain duties in return. Atterbury was bishop of Rochester. Arbuthnot, perhaps the wittiest man of his time, who, according to his friend Swift, could do everything but walk, was one of the

physicians in ordinary to the Queen. John Hughes, whose friendship with Addison does him far more honour than his verses, was Secretary to the Commissions of the Peace, "a situation of great profit;" Rowe, the author of 'Jane Shore' and the 'Fair Penitent,' held for three years of Anne's reign the post of Under-Secretary, and at the accession of George I. was made one of the Land Surveyors of the Port of London and Clerk to the Council of the Prince of Wales. Nor was this all, for the Lord Chancellor Parker, "as soon as he received the Seals, appointed him, unasked, Secretary of the Presentations." Young, a fulsome flatterer, was in the pay of the Court and Chaplain to George II. At the age of eighty he was appointed Clerk of the Closet to the Princess Dowager; but he never received the high preferment such a man might reasonably have expected. Swift, who possessed the most robust intellect of the age, was the least cared for by Government. During the Administration of Harley and St. John he was probably the most influential man in the country. Those Ministers treated him as their intimate friend, called him by his Christian name, made abundant use of his marvellous ability, and at last, as a reward for his services, sent him into exile to live on the income of



a poor Irish deanery. But Swift, unfortunately for his prospects of advancement, was a clergyman, and the Queen's repugnance to the author of 'A Tale of a Tub' was too deep to be overcome. Although Swift, in telling Stella of his promotion, says he is less out of humour than she would imagine, he finds it difficult to conceal his disgust. "I confess," he wrote, "I thought the Ministry would not let me go, but perhaps they can't help it." This was no doubt the case. Swift could push the fortunes of other people, but not his own, and it is not to be wondered at that so respectably pious a queen as Anne should have disliked the author of what she must have regarded as a profane book, a book, too, the wit of which she was unable to appreciate. It was thus that Swift missed the preferment attained by almost all his literary contemporaries, whether clergymen or laymen, and no doubt Mr. Henry Morley is right in saying that if the Dean had not written the 'Tale of a Tub' he would have died a bishop.

Perhaps in all that circle of wits there was no man whose advancement from a low estate to high official honours was more signal than that of Matthew Prior. He was, indeed, apart from his literary gifts, a man of considerable ability, ready

with speech as with pen. His address must have been winning, his skill as a diplomatist considerable, and his general culture entitled him to respect at a time when even statesmen were very partially educated, and when one of the reasons given for making St. John, Secretary of State was, that he was the only person about the Court who understood French. Matthew Prior, or "Matt Prior," as he was familiarly called by his associates, came of so obscure a parentage that his birthplace is open to conjecture. He was born in 1664, and placed by his uncle, a tavern-keeper near Charing Cross, at Westminster School, then under the charge of the renowned Dr. Busby. Samuel Prior's tavern appears to have been frequented by the nobility, and there the young scholar and poet was discovered by the Earl of Dorset, reading Horace. Lord Dorset, himself a small poet and a splendid patron of poets, was afterwards praised by Prior in language which may have been sincere, but which to modern ears sounds ridiculously extravagant. "The manner in which the Earl wrote," he says, "will hardly ever be equalled; every one of his pieces is an ingot of gold, such as, wrought or beaten thinner, would shine through a whole book of any other author." His verses have a lustre like that of the sun in Claude

Lorraine's landscapes; his love poems "convey the wit of Petronius in the softness of Tibullus; his satire" is so severely pointed that in it he appears what his great friend the Earl of Rochester (that other prodigy of the age) says he was,

'The best good man, with the worst natur'd Muse.'

Yet so far was this great author from valuing himself upon his works that he cared not what became of them, though everybody else did. There are many things of his not extant in writing, which, like the verses and sayings of the ancient Druids, retain an universal veneration, though they are preserved only by memory. Moreover Lord Dorset's virtues, according to his panegyrist, were as conspicuous as his genius; he was the model of all that is great and noble; and "for his charity, we can scarce find a parallel in history itself." That Prior, like Dryden, should have absurdly praised the man who had done his best to serve him was in accordance with the taste of the age, and the poet who found a patron was bound to render him such return as a poet best could.

Prior was transferred by his munificent friend from the "Rummer Tavern" to St. John's College, Cambridge, where a far greater poet gained, a

hundred years later, such education as a university could impart to a Wordsworth. One of his first literary efforts at Cambridge was in conjunction with an acquaintance whose advancement in the State was destined to be yet more distinguished than his own. In 1687 John Dryden, who had discovered the truth of the Roman Catholic faith soon after the accession of a Roman Catholic king, published his famous poem 'The Hind and the Panther.' It called forth a number of replies, both serious and burlesque, of which one only, entitled 'The Country Mouse and the City Mouse,' written by Charles Montague and Matthew Prior, can be said to have survived. Montague was the son of a younger son of a nobleman, and, like Prior, was educated under Busby. The two Westminster boys went to Cambridge in the same year, and the good fortune of Montague, like that of his friend, appears to have been due in the first instance to a knack of verse-making. To call him a poet would be as absurd as to call an organ-grinder a musician, but his lines on the death of King Charles started him on the road to fortune. He was born for the House of Commons, and once there, as Macaulay observes, his life during some years was a series of triumphs. "At thirty he would gladly have given all his chances in life

for a comfortable vicarage and a chaplain's scarf. At thirty-seven he was First Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a Regent of the Kingdom."

Prior, who knew that as a poet he was beyond comparison superior to Montague, and that even of this parody the best part was his work,* grumbled at the speedy promotion of his literary partner. But his own advancement was at hand. In 1691 he was appointed secretary to the Embassy which joined the Congress at the Hague, and afterwards received the post of Gentleman of the Bedchamber to King William. When Mary died he wrote an elegy on her death, addressed to the King in an exhausting number of stanzas. It is after the manner of such loyal poems, and no doubt Dr. Johnson is right in his conjecture that William never read it, for Prior himself complains that the King did not understand poetical eulogy. If he had read this threnody he would have learnt that he was the sun whose auspicious light could alone give joy to the mourning nations, and whose sublime meridian course must atone for Mary's setting rays; that half of him

* "Did not Halifax," asked Spence of Lord Peterborough, "write 'The Country Mouse' with Mr. Pryor?" "Yes—just as if I was in a chaise with Mr. Cheselden here, drawn by his fine horse, and should say—Lord, how finely we draw this chaise!"

was deified before his death; that from Mary's glory angels trace the beauty of her partner's soul; and how, to quote the final stanza—

> "Alone to thy renown 'tis given
> Unbounded through all worlds to go,
> While she, great saint, rejoices Heaven;
> And thou sustain'st the orb below."

It seems impossible to conceive that anyone, whether king or commoner, would care to read a mechanical piece of verse like this, but such poems were then the fashion, and were written and endured, no doubt, simply because they were fashionable.* Prior, a courtier by nature, never lost an opportunity of discovering and celebrating kingly virtues, and his 'Carmen Seculare,' a poem published five years later, "one of his longest and most splendid compositions," according to Dr. Johnson's verdict, is perhaps as good a specimen as the age could show of enco-

* The death of Queen Mary at the early age of thirty-two formed an affecting theme for the versemen. One of the most curious is a pastoral, written on the occasion by Congreve, in which William, "chief of all the swains," is seen—

> "Stretched on the ground, and close to earth his face
> Scalding with tears th' already faded grass,
> To the cold clay he joins his throbbing breast,
> No more within Pastora's arms to rest."

Steele, who also tried his hand in rhyme, produced a piece which is little better than doggerel. The grief of the nation for the loss of Mary was genuine, but we cannot say as much for the poetry it called forth.

miastic verse. But it is a dreary specimen notwithstanding.

Biography was an art little practised in Prior's time, and the details handed down to us respecting the poet's official life are comparatively few and insignificant. What there are, however, will be worth recording, for they show that he filled the posts assigned to him with dignity and tact. In 1697 Prior was appointed secretary to the English negotiators at the Treaty of Ryswick, the conclusion of which caused such abounding joy in England. The same year he was nominated principal Secretary of State in Ireland, and in 1698 he was secretary to the Embassy in France under the Earl of Portland and the Earl of Jersey. Lord Macaulay has described this embassy, "the most magnificent that England had ever sent to any foreign Court," with his accustomed wealth of detail and picturesqueness of style. The passage referring to Prior, however familiar, deserves to be transcribed, since it is impossible to relate the anecdotes contained in it more briefly or in such felicitous language:

"Prior was Secretary of Legation. His quick parts, his industry, his politeness, and his perfect knowledge of the French language marked him out as eminently fitted for diplomatic employment. He had, however, found much difficulty in overcoming an odd prejudice which his chief had conceived against

him. Portland, with good natural abilities and great expertness in business, was no scholar. He had probably never read an English book; but he had a general notion, unhappily but too well founded, that the wits and poets who congregated at Will's, were a most profane and licentious set; and being himself a man of orthodox opinions and regular life, he was not disposed to give his confidence to one whom he supposed to be a ribald scoffer. Prior, with much address, and, perhaps with the help of a little hypocrisy, completely removed this unfavourable impression. He talked on serious subjects seriously, quoted the New Testament appositely, vindicated Hammond from the charge of Popery, and, by way of a decisive blow, gave the definition of a true Church from the nineteenth Article. Portland stared at him. 'I am glad, Mr. Prior, to find you so good a Christian. I was afraid you were an atheist.' 'An atheist, my good Lord?' cried Prior. 'What could lead your Lordship to entertain such a suspicion?' 'Why,' said Portland, 'I knew that you were a poet, and I took it for granted that you did not believe in God.' 'My Lord,' said the wit, 'you do us poets the greatest injustice. Of all people we are farthest from atheism. For the atheists do not even worship the true God whom the rest of mankind acknowledge; and we are always invoking and hymning false gods whom everybody else has renounced.' This jest will be perfectly intelligible to all who remember the eternally recurring allusions to Venus and Minerva, Mars, Cupid, and Apollo, which were meant to be the ornaments, and are the blemishes, of Prior's compositions. But Portland was much puzzled. However, he declared himself satisfied; and the young diplomatist withdrew, laughing to think with how little learning a man may shine in courts, lead armies, negotiate treaties, obtain a coronet and a garter, and leave a fortune of half a million."*

Prior's wit and readiness of repartee were not always exercised on men as thick-headed as Port-

* 'History of England,' vol. v., p. 84.

land, and it was during this residence in Paris that he received attentions from distinguished Frenchmen like the Prince of Condé and Bossuet. Then, too, it was that on seeing at Versailles the pictures painted by Le Brun to commemorate the victories of Louis XIV., he was asked whether King William's palace was similarly adorned, and made the famous reply, "The monuments of my master's actions are to be seen everywhere but in his own house." At all times and in all places the poet proved himself a distinguished courtier, and his conversation and manners were warmly praised by the French king, "a circumstance," says Macaulay, "which will be thought remarkable when it is remembered that His Majesty was an excellent model and an excellent judge of gentlemanlike deportment, and that Prior had passed his boyhood in drawing corks at a tavern, and his early manhood in the seclusion of a college."

It has been said, on grounds that will scarcely bear examination, that Prior was not a good man of business. Pope says he was nothing out of verse, but then Pope disliked Prior. Swift, a far better judge, writes highly of his abilities in the management of affairs, and Lord Bolingbroke, addressing Queen Anne, states that Prior is "the best versed in

matters of trade of all your Majesty's servants," a remark which it is probable Lord Macaulay had in his mind when he observes that, like Montague, Prior was distinguished by an intimate knowledge of trade and finance. That King William, who cared not a jot for literature, and was, therefore, not likely to be prejudiced in Prior's favour in consequence of his genius as a poet, did thoroughly confide in him, is a strong proof of his qualifications as a man of affairs. Another proof is to be found in the fact that in the year after the French Embassy, Prior, having served for a time as Under-Secretary of State, was made Commissioner of Trade. In 1701 he was elected member for East Grinstead. Three years later, when Harley became Secretary of State, and St. John, who, according to Swift, was much the greatest commoner in England, Secretary at War, Prior, like his friend Swift, at a later period, joined the Tory party, and lent his wit to the support of his new associates.

Some years passed, of which, so far as concerns Prior, we have no record, but in 1711 he was privately appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of France in order to negotiate a peace, his credentials being signed by the Queen's own hand. "Prior," writes Swift to Stella, "has been out of



town these two months, nobody knows where." Yet he conjectures he had been to France. In a letter to Queen Anne, King Louis writes, "I shall expect with impatience the return of Mr. Prior, whose conduct is very agreeable to me." St. John, it is said, pretended to know nothing of Prior's business when Swift questioned him, but the secret oozed out when Prior reached England. "He had landed at Deal," writes Lord Stanhope, "from a small vessel and under a feigned name, but being taken for a smuggler, he was seized by the custom-house officers and obliged to produce his pass, nor was he released until orders from London came." In 1712 the treaty-maker accompanied St. John (now Viscount Bolingbroke) to Paris, and remained there as Chargé d'Affaires until the death of the Queen and a change of Ministry reduced him to a private station. In France in the present day a statesman or politician whose conduct has ceased to be approved is in danger of imprisonment or exile; in England a century and a half ago a public man, on the fall of his party, was liable to a similar punishment. Soon after the accession of George I. the Whig Ministers took proceedings against all concerned in the Peace of Utrecht, and when Prior arrived in England in the spring of 1715 he was subject to what he calls a

"wild examination" before a Committee of the Privy Council. Great caution was needed on his part if it be true, as he says, that the Committee endeavoured to extort evidence from him which would bring his friends to the scaffold; but Prior, according to his own narrative, was equal to the emergency. The examination lasted a week, and the ex-Ambassador was then ordered into close custody. Two years, of which we have no record, were spent in prison. In 1717, when an Act of Grace was passed, Prior was excluded from it, but he obtained his discharge shortly afterwards, and in the following year produced by subscription a folio edition of his poems, published in splendid style by Tonson. In the long list of titled subscribers, of dukes and earls, of lords and bishops, it is pleasant also to read the names of Pope and Steele, of Gay and Swift. The Dean, careful though he was about expenditure, took five copies, which must have cost him ten guineas. The poet spent the rest of his days in the country, and died at Wimpole, a seat of the Earl of Oxford, in 1721, in the fifty-eighth year of his age. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, under a ponderous Latin epitaph, for which, including the monument, he left 500*l.* in his will.

It was possible in the last century, as it had been



in the Elizabethan age, for men of considerable mark in politics or literature to pass off the scene without the danger so imminent in our time of being done to death again in a biography. To edify us in these garrulous days, two, three, or even four volumes are often dedicated to the memory of third-rate men and women; in Queen Anne's age a writer or statesman of first-rate eminence was generally dismissed with a memoir that would now be considered brief in a biographical dictionary. It was not that writers possessed in those days, any more than in these, "the talent of silence," but that their communicative power was exercised in other channels.

Prior was distinguished as an ambassador and poet, and yet our knowledge of him, and especially "of his behaviour in the lighter parts of life," is very slight indeed. For some years Swift and Prior were constantly together, and in the Journal to Stella, Prior's name is mentioned more than fifty times. The writer was a great satirist as well as one of the shrewdest observers that ever lived, yet to Prior's character, to his manners, even to his personal appearance, we find only the most incidental allusions. It may be worth while, however, to glean a few grains from this field. No doubt, like all poets, Prior loved praise. "He was damped,"

says Swift on one occasion, "until I stuffed him with two or three compliments;" at another time he writes, "Prior and I sat on, when we complimented one another for an hour or two upon our mutual wit and poetry." He received the present of a fine 'Plautus' from Prior, and we read in the Journal that after dining one day with St. John the two poets adjourned to Prior's lodgings to sup off a cold pie, "and I hate the thoughts of it," Swift adds, "and I am full, and I do not like it." Then we learn that Prior, like a good courtier, was always mindful to attend the Lord Treasurer's dinners. Drinking, says his friend, will not do with Prior's lean carcase. Even statesmen were in those days addicted to hard drinking, and men with weakly constitutions suffered accordingly. Swift observes that Prior had generally a cough, which he called a cold, and, in allusion to their frequent walks round the Park, he adds, "This walking is a strange remedy. Mr. Prior walks to make himself fat, and I to bring myself down." Swift thought Prior one of the best talkers of the day, but not a fair one, since he left no elbow-room for another, which Addison always did. He lacked the "flashes of silence" for which in Macaulay's later years Sidney Smith gave him credit. The Dean himself was a famous punster,



and Prior also enjoyed this low kind of humour, but the only specimens preserved of his skill in this way are of the most wretched description.

Men of letters in that age seem to have avoided matrimony. Swift and Pope, Thomson and Gay, Congreve and Fenton, were bachelors, and the few who did marry were either, like Addison, unfortunate in their choice, or like Parnell, in the brief duration of their happiness. Prior, who was also a bachelor, lived the careless and licentious life of a man about town, and the female companionship he selected for himself was of the coarsest description. He was a member of the Kit Cat Club, and of the famous Brothers' Club, started by St. John for "the improvement of friendship and the encouragement of letters." But although living as the associate and equal of noblemen and statesmen, his tastes were unrefined, and it is stated that after spending an evening with Bolingbroke, Pope, and Swift, he would smoke a pipe and drink ale with a common soldier and his wife in Long Acre. This soldier died shortly before the poet, and Arbuthnot observes that Prior had a narrow escape by dying, since, had he lived, he would have married the widow. The truth is, there was no moral greatness in Prior. He could say fine things —it was he who said, and he deserves the praise of

it, "I had rather be thought a good Englishman than the best poet or greatest scholar that ever wrote"—but his poetry, like his life, has no affinity with what we deem lofty and noble. He walked in the plain, and never breathed the pure invigorating air of the mountains. His philosophy, if he had any, was to make the best of life, and to take as his rule the Horatian maxim, "*Quid sit futurum cras fuge quærere; et quem Fors dierum cumque dabit, lucro appone.*" In his 'Solomon' thought is called the worst of evils, and he is constantly reiterating the sentiment that thought only serves to deepen the sadness of life:

"If we see right we see our woes;
Then what avails it to have eyes?
From ignorance our comfort flows;
The only wretched are the wise."

In 'Alma,' a droll discourse on the seat of the soul, from which Voltaire has taken many ideas and much foulness,* Prior makes his friend Richard say—

"Sir, if it be your wisdom's aim
To make me merrier than I am,
I'll be all night at your devotion—
Come on, friend; broach the pleasing notion;
But if you would depress my thought,
Your system is not worth a groat."

* M. Taine.



And the conclusion of the poem suggests that wisdom, since it makes one sad, is of little value, and that the solace of the bottle is to be preferred to the sage maxims of philosophers. It is generally unsafe to attempt to supply, by the help of a poet's verse, the deficiencies of his biographer; but Prior frequently writes about himself in an easy colloquial strain, and if there be some jest in his song, there is also a considerable share of truth. There is a little piece, for instance, written at the Hague, that is drawn, no doubt, from the life, in which he describes himself as released from the cares of business, and driving

> "In a little Dutch chaise on a Saturday night,
> On my left hand my Horace, a nymph on my right."

And when in a piece written for his own monument he says he was industrious and grave in public employments, and merry when alone with his friends, we may safely take the assurance for something more than a poetical fancy; for we know that he was to be trusted in official life, and we know also that he was a man eminently sociable, a great diner-out, a lover of good cheer, a maker of puns, and an entertaining companion. Men like Harley, Bolingbroke, and Swift would not have been attracted again and again to Prior's house if their host had

not been agreeable. It is remarkable, too, that in that age of bitter animosities and coarse vituperation few words, save those of kindness, were uttered with regard to Prior. Pope said that he was "not a right good man," and, for once in his life, probably spoke the truth, since the courtly ambassador and brilliant poet practised low vices;* but Prior, unlike Pope, appears to have been free from dissimulation. His faults were the faults of Tom Jones, not the faults of Blifil.

The reader of Prior's poetry will be struck by its variety, and this variety, according to Dr. Johnson, has made him popular. He began his poetical life by writing a burlesque; he ended it by producing

* It is but just to observe that John Wesley denies the report made by Spence and others with regard to Prior's licentiousness—a report which is in a measure confirmed by the looseness of his verses—and he adds the following curious statement with regard to the poet's Chloe. "Others say his Chloe was ideal. I know the contrary. I have heard my eldest brother say her name was Miss Taylor; that he knew her well; and that she once came to him (in Dean's Yard, Westminster) purposely to ask his advice. She told him, 'Sir, I know not what to do. Mr. Prior makes large professions of his love, but he never offers me marriage.' My brother advised her to bring the matter to a point at once. She went directly to Mr. Prior, and asked him plainly, 'Do you intend to marry me or no?' He said many soft and pretty things; on which she said, 'Sir, in refusing to answer, you *do* answer. I will see you no more.' And she did see him no more to the day of his death. But afterwards she spent many hours, standing and weeping at his tomb in Westminster Abbey."



'Solomon,' a long didactic poem, which, according to John Wesley, and to Hannah More who echoed his opinion, is one of the noblest poems in the English language, and which, in the estimation of that remarkable critic the Rev. George Gilfillan, whose judgments on poetry are sometimes as amusing as a jest-book, contains in it touches of nature little inferior to Shakespeare. We fear that even these criticisms will not induce many readers now-a-days to read 'Solomon,' a poem in three books, the whole of which is a soliloquy. It contains many fine passages, which are more like splendid rhetoric than poetry, and some exquisite absurdities, as, for example, when the Jewish king is made to prophesy the future greatness of Britain:

> "From pole to pole she hears her acts resound,
> And rules an empire by no ocean bound;
> Knows her ships anchored, and her sails unfurled,
> In other Indies and a second world.
> Long shall Britannia (that must be her name)
> Be first in conquest and preside in fame,"

or, when in love with a beautiful woman, he declares that in her "jetty curls ten thousand Cupids played," or when an angel is sent to give him the sound but commonplace advice—

> "Now, Solomon, remembering who thou art,
> Act through thy remnant life the decent part."



All poetry save the highest has a tendency to go out of fashion, and there is nothing sadder in the history of literature than the pages which illustrate the gradual oblivion of writers once famous and popular. When De Quincey observed that every age buries its own literature, he did but exaggerate a painful truth; a large portion of it no doubt becomes utterly extinct, or is but dragged to the light for a few hours by some hungry book-worm, to be once more placed, not always with reverence, amidst congenial dust. Prior, we beg our readers to remember, was once a famous poet. Did he not gain 4000*l.* by the publication of his verses, were not his principal pieces translated into Latin and French, and did not Johnson (long years after the poet's death) declare that Prior is a lady's book, and that no lady is ashamed to have it standing in her library? On the strength of this statement from that archpriest of morality we do not recommend any lady to venture upon an indiscriminate perusal of Prior; but the Doctor's assertion is a proof, at all events, that more than fifty years after the poet's death he retained a place amongst authors familiar to general readers. Another and still more striking instance of Prior's popularity is the way in which some of his thoughts were appropriated by con-



temporary poets, as well as by writers who belonged to a later period of the century. It has already been observed that Voltaire borrowed many ideas from 'Alma.' Southey has pointed out that from Prior, Pope has adopted some of the most conspicuous artifices of his verse; and this remark, which is quite true, scarcely covers all Pope's obligations to his brother-poet. Gray and Collins, the chief lyric poets of their time, are not without some traces of indebtedness to the same source. Charles Wesley's well-known hymn commencing—

> "Lo! on a narrow neck of land
> 'Twixt two unbounded seas I stand,"

was, there can be little doubt, suggested by the couplet in 'Solomon'—

> "Amid two seas, on one small point of land,
> Wearied, uncertain, and amazed we stand;"

and there are even traces in Cowper, one of the most original of poets, of his familiar acquaintance with Prior, who in Cowper's younger days was at the height of his fame. The use, however, which one poet makes of another, a use often involuntary, is not to be hastily set down as plagiarism. "It seems," says Pope, "not so much the perfection of sense to say things that had never been said before,

as to express those best that have been said oftenest." And he adds that writers borrowing from others are like trees which of themselves would produce only one sort of fruit, but upon being grafted upon others may yield a variety.

Prior, strange to say, has received his warmest eulogium from the pious founder of Methodism. John Wesley, who even in the busiest portion of his life was an omnivorous reader, and probably read more volumes through while riding on horseback or driving in his carriage than many men who with ample leisure boast of a taste for literature, was a great admirer of Prior. He frequently quotes from his poems in his letters and sermons, and devotes an essay to his defence in reply to what he considered the disparaging remarks of Dr. Johnson. He allows that he often wrote hastily, and has many unpolished lines, but considers that his genius at its best is "not inferior in strength to any besides Milton." His tales, he observes, replying *seriatim* to the criticisms of Johnson, are certainly the best told of any in the English tongue. "Never man wrote with more tenderness—witness the preface to 'Henry and Emma,' with the whole inimitable poem." And as for the Doctor's complaint of the tediousness of 'Solomon,' "I should as soon think,"



says Wesley, "of tediousness in the Second or Sixth 'Æneid'!" And Prior had the honour—no slight honour surely—of being warmly praised by Cowper, who wrote of 'Henry and Emma,' of which we shall have something to say presently, as an "enchanting piece," to which few readers of poetry have not given a consecrated place in their memories, and of Prior, generally, as a poet "who with much labour, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease."

In this criticism Cowper has hit upon the most striking characteristic of Prior's verse,—its "charming ease." His poetry contains, no doubt, a large amount of mythological rubbish. Such rubbish was the product of the age, and Prior wrote as he lived, after the fashion of his time. But as a lyric poet, whose genius is stimulated by social gaiety, and whose wit is ready at command, he has no rival in his century. His position may not be a lofty one, but he fills it perfectly. As an epigrammatist he is admirable; as a writer of humourous and not over-modest tales he is excelled only by La Fontaine; his love-verses, although destitute of soul and passion, as might be expected from a man living loose upon the town, are remarkable for gracefulness and felicity of expres-

sion. He was the Thomas Moore—too often, indeed, the Tom Little—of his age, and marks of his influence may readily be traced in the sparkling effusions of the Irish poet. It may be as well to add, what some of our readers will doubtless remember, that Dr. Johnson's opinion of Prior's amorous verses differs considerably from ours. He declares that they have neither nature nor passion, gallantry nor tenderness; that they have the coldness of Cowley without his wit, and are the dull exercises of a skilful versifier trying to be amorous by dint of study. Passion they no doubt lack, and tenderness also; but they have a lightness of touch, a gallantry of tone, and, to quote the phrase aptly applied to them by Hazlitt, "a mischievous gaiety," which entitles them, we think, to a high place amongst occasional verses. It must be allowed, however, that the pieces meriting this praise are but few in number, and that the best of these are tainted with immodesty, and will not admit of quotation. If poets and versemen like Prior would but remember that by the abnegation of purity they exile themselves from the best society and the most appreciative readers in the world, they might be led to watch over their words more strictly, even if no

nobler motive kept them from transgressing. A century and a half ago, however, the risk of being banished from the boudoir for over-plain speaking, and for *double entendre*, was a very slight risk indeed, and Prior's contemporaries and immediate successors in composing occasional verses, were more gross, and far less felicitous. Gay and Somerville, for instance, are often coarser than Prior, but they are by no means so sparkling. Pope, the greatest poet of the age, transgresses in a manner more offensive than witty, and Swift, who possessed "the best brains in the nation," wrote the nastiest verses to be found in our language.

But it is time to give an illustration or two of Prior's sportive ease and grace as a lyric poet. Thomas Moore, writing to Lord Lansdowne, alludes to one of Prior's pieces, and observes that nothing could be more gracefully light and gallant. No wonder that it pleased the Irish poet, for the conceit in it is so like some of his own that anyone ignorant of the authorship would at once credit Moore with the production. Listen only to the three last stanzas:

"The god of us versemen, you know child, the sun,
How after his journeys he sets up his rest;
If at morning o'er earth 'tis his fancy to run,
At night he declines on his Thetis's breast.

So, when I am wearied with wandering all day,
To thee, my delight, in the evening I come;
No matter what beauties I saw in my way,
They were but my visits, but thou art my home.

Then finish, dear Chloe, this pastoral war;
And let us like Horace and Lydia agree:
For thou art a girl as much brighter than her
As he was a poet sublimer than me."

In an ode to a lady who declines to dispute any longer with the poet, and "leaves him in the argument," he sings in language which is as free from an antique flavour, as if it had been produced yesterday:

"In the dispute, whate'er I said,
My heart was by my tongue belied;
And in my looks you might have read
How much I argued on your side.

* * * * *

Alas! not hoping to subdue,
I only to the fight aspired;
To keep the beauteous foe in view
Was all the glory I desired.

But she, howe'er of victory sure,
Contemns the wreath too long delayed;
And, armed with more immediate power,
Calls cruel silence to her aid.

Deeper to wound she shuns the fight;
She drops her arms to gain the field:
Secures her conquest by her flight,
And triumphs when she seems to yield."



The qualities of vivacity and ease are well displayed in the following description of 'A Lover's Anger':

"As Chloe came into the room t'other day,
I peevish began, 'Where so long could you stay?
In your lifetime you never regarded your hour;
You promised at two, and (pray look, child) 'tis four.
A lady's watch needs neither figures nor wheels;
'Tis enough that 'tis loaded with baubles and seals.
A temper so heedless no mortal can bear.—'
Thus far I went on with a resolute air.
'Lord bless me!' said she; 'let a body but speak;
Here's an ugly hard rose-bud fall'n into my neck;
It has hurt me and vexed me to such a degree—
See here! for you never believe me; pray see,
On the left side my breast what a mark it has made!'
So saying, her bosom she careless displayed:
That seat of delight I with wonder surveyed,
And forgot every word I designed to have said."

As a song-writer Prior never excels, and sometimes fails ignominiously. He wrote twenty-eight songs, of which the greater number were "set to music by the most eminent masters." They are sad rubbish, although now and then a happy phrase or ingenious fancy reminds us that they are not the compositions of a commonplace writer. If Dr. Johnson had been thinking of these pieces when he wrote of Prior's amorous poems as the "dull exercises of a skilful versifier," we should not quarrel with his judgment, although we might complain of his indifference and forgetfulness in estimating the

poet's love-verses by the least significant productions of his pen. From the context, however, it is evident he had in his mind certain of the love-pieces which do not rank under the category of songs, and he hits, as an adverse critic naturally would do, on some which are over-weighted with mythological imagery. Prior had, no doubt, as we have before observed, the poetical disease of the day, but he took it in a mild form, and manages in one or two cases, which unfortunately we cannot quote, to turn this sort of machinery to skilful account. Throughout the criticism on Prior it seems to us that Johnson dispenses his praise as well as his blame wrongly. He cannot see the consummate charm of many of Prior's occasional verses, and he praises as "eminently beautiful" a watery paraphrase of St. Paul's noble utterances upon charity. Imagine a reader turning from the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians to find beauty in lines like these:

> "Each other gift which God on man bestows,
> Its proper bounds and due restriction knows;
> To one fixt purpose dedicates its power,
> And finishing its act, exists no more.
> Thus, in obedience to what Heaven decrees,
> Knowledge shall fail, and prophecy shall cease;
> But lasting Charity's more ample sway,
> Nor bound by time nor subject to decay,
> In happy triumph shall for ever live,
> And endless good diffuse, and endless praise receive."



How differently the poet could write when he found a congenial topic may be seen from the bright and graceful lines he addresses 'To a Child of Quality.' In reading them it may be well to remember the report that has been handed down to us of Prior's genial nature, and how when staying in Lord Oxford's house he made himself beloved by every living thing—master, child, servants; human creature, or animal. When the poem was written, the child was five years old and the author forty.

" Lords, knights, and squires, the numerous band
That wear the fair Miss Mary's fetters,
Were summoned by her high command
To show their passion by their letters.

My pen among the rest I took,
Lest those bright eyes that cannot read
Should dart their kindling fires, and look
The power they have to be obeyed.

Nor quality nor reputation
Forbid me yet my flame to tell;
Dear five years old befriends my passion
And I may write till she can spell.

For while she makes her silkworms beds
With all the tender things I swear;
Whilst all the house my passion reads
In papers round her baby's hair;

She may receive and own my flame,
For, though the strictest prudes should know it,
She'll pass for a most virtuous dame,
And I for an unhappy poet.

Then, too, alas! when she shall tear
The lines some younger rival sends,
She'll give me leave to write, I fear,
And we shall still continue friends.

For as our different ages move,
'Tis so ordain'd (would Fate but mend it!)
That I shall be past making love
When she begins to comprehend it."

This is not richly imaginative verse, but of its kind it is perfect; nothing could be more felicitous in feeling or in phrase, and there are few readers that will not appreciate its charm. "Prior's serious poetry," says Hazlitt, "is as heavy as his familiar style was light and agreeable." No doubt he was more of a wit than a poet, and his happiest pieces are epigrams and society verses. Many of these read as if they had been composed impromptu; and that the poet had this readiness in composition we know from the fact that in a company of Frenchmen he produced on one occasion some pretty extempore lines in French. No notice of Prior can be satisfactory without a specimen or two of his craft as an epigrammatist. Here is a piece entitled 'The Remedy worse than the Disease':

"I sent for Ratcliffe; was so ill
That other doctors gave me over;
He felt my pulse, prescribed his pill,
And I was likely to recover.



But when the wit began to wheeze,
And wine had warmed the politician,
Cured yesterday of my disease,
I died last night of my physician."

If Prior owes the suggestion of the following to a far greater epigrammatist, it must be allowed that he puts the thought suggested by the Latin poet into admirable shape:

"To John I owed great obligation,
But John unhappily thought fit
To publish it to all the nation;
Sure John and I are more than quit."

And here is one expressed with similar felicity:

"Yes, every poet is a fool;
By demonstration Ned can show it;
Happy, could Ned's inverted rule
Prove every fool to be a poet."

The following, written in a lady's copy of Milton, is also good, and has received high praise—higher, perhaps, than it merits:

"With virtue strong as yours had Eve been armed,
In vain the fruit had blushed or serpent charmed;
Nor had our bliss by penitence been bought,
Nor had frail Adam fallen, nor Milton wrote."

Take another, not a little severe upon Pope's friend, Atterbury, who, it may be remembered, was accused, probably with injustice, of infidelity. The

lines refer to the funeral of the Duke of Buckingham, at which the Bishop officiated:

"'I have no hopes,' the duke he says, and dies;
'In sure and certain hope,' the prelate cries:
Of these two learned peers, I prithee say, man,
Who is the lying knave, the priest or layman?
The duke he stands an infidel confest,
'He's our dear brother,' quoth the lordly priest;
The duke, though knave, still 'brother dear,' he cries;
And who can say the reverend prelate lies?"

The Rev. Henry Dodd, in his valuable work 'The Epigrammatists,' has made two mistakes with regard to Prior. He observes that he ranks "among the greater poets," which is assuredly not true; and that "with a few exceptions his epigrams are of the very lowest type," which we venture to think is a blunder also. Most readers will prefer Mr. Thackeray's judgment that they have "the genuine sparkle."

A fine specimen of Prior's skill as a poetical wit is the famous burlesque on Boileau's ode on Namur, and that he does sometimes succeed in grave and thoughtful verse is proved by his ode addressed to Montague, a poem highly praised by Warton. Warton finds also much tenderness and pathos in Prior's 'Henry and Emma,' a piece which strikes us as false in conception and feeble and

verbose in execution. Yet it must not be passed by without a few words of comment, seeing that it has been warmly praised by intelligent judges. The ballad of the 'Nut-Brown Maid,' upon which Prior founded his poem, describes a jealous or curious lover who tests the fidelity of his lady-love by telling her that he is a banished man, that if she flies with him she will be regarded as a wanton; and when these statements fail to daunt her, he adds that he has another lady in the woods whom he loves more than her. But even this revelation fails to shake her constancy; whereupon the lover, having tested her affection sufficiently, tells the Nut-Brown Maid that he is neither banished for his crimes nor false in his love, that he is, moreover, an earl's son, and is ready to marry her "as shortly as he can." The old ballad does not disturb one's sense of fitness like the modern version, partly, no doubt, owing to its antique flavour, and partly from the lightness and beauty of the story, which is told with the utmost simplicity. Prior's Henry, on the contrary, an unpleasant and suspicious lover of the eighteenth century, labours so hard to prove himself a scoundrel, that when at last he invokes "solemn Jove" and "conscious Venus," and beseeches the "bright maid" to believe him while he swears that

he is no banished man or perjured knight, and asks her to excuse a trial, in the course of which he has accused her of gross immodesty, one feels vexed that Emma does not indignantly reject instead of eagerly accepting his overtures. Not a word of reproof does she utter for his unmanly conduct, but sees in him the lord of her desire, declares that his will must dictate her fate, and asks to be allowed to employ her life subservient to his joy. The whole poem is unsatisfactory and even offensive from Henry's want of manliness, and from the lack in Emma of maidenly dignity, and we find it hard to say which of the lovers we like the least. The diction of the piece, moreover, is entirely conventional, the construction mechanical, and it would be difficult to compress within an equal number of lines more wretched balderdash than Prior has written on the last page of his poem. The Queen of Beauty, so says the poet (with a fine sense of congruity which must strike every reader), being proud and pleased to hear the vow of Henry and Emma, stopped her bridled doves and called upon Mars to let Fame extol her favourite Anna's wondrous reign, and the unwearied toils of Marlborough; and afterwards, Gaul being thrice vanquished, to record, "with second breath," the triumphs of Venus,



who is to be as faithful as Emma, while Mars is to copy the fidelity of Henry.

> "And when thy tumults and thy fights are past,
> And when thy laurels at my feet are cast,
> Faithful may'st thou, like British Henry, prove,
> And Emma-like, let me return thy love."

After this the Cyprian deity requests the "great god of days and verse" that one day may be set apart yearly for sports and floral play in honour of the true lover and the Nut-Brown Maid. What a passage is this, and how flatly it falls upon modern ears! The vivid imagination of Keats gave new life to the old mythology, but to the Queen Anne men it was for the most part mere lumber, and Prior, though he turns it to clever if not poetical uses elsewhere, has failed to catch from it the slightest inspiration in this poem.

We do not like to part from Prior in a mood of disparaging criticism. Like all poets, he has his weak side. No admirer of Milton or of Wordsworth would care to dwell on their pitiful attempts at humour. Spenser is not famous for wit, or Butler for pathos. We go to Shelley, and not to Crabbe, for splendid bursts of imagination; we do not expect (M. Taine notwithstanding) an accurate description of natural objects from Pope, nor do we look to

Thomson for fine satire. In the poetry of Prior there is much that had its day and its meaning which is now meaningless and dead. Few, except curious students, will read his 'Alma,' still fewer his 'Solomon,' although in Wesley's opinion it contains some of the finest verses that ever appeared in the English tongue; and in spite of Cowper's admiration we venture to say that not one youth or maiden in this kingdom will ever again commit to memory his 'Henry and Emma.' But if we sweep away as refuse a great deal that was once admired, and admired, perhaps, not altogether unreasonably, enough remains to give Matthew Prior a high position among the poets whose bright wit and fertile fancy have been expended on occasional verses, and to justify the opinion of Mr. Thackeray that his lyrical poems are "amongst the easiest, the richest, the most charmingly humourous" in the English language.



SIR RICHARD STEELE.

AMONG the Queen Anne writers there is no figure which we seem to see more vividly than that of Sir Richard Steele. The man was by no means a hero. He wanted strength of will and the invincible determination that struggles successfully with evil. He was always sinning, always repenting; and there was no doubt a want of backbone in a nature that could thus lightly yield to temptation. There are many persons whose characters are so firmly knit that the compassion they may feel for a man like Steele is closely allied to contempt; there are others, more generous and perhaps more wise, whose sorrow for the failings of such a life is largely blended with sympathy. They will feel that, if there be much to regret in the story of Steele's career, there is much also which gives us a higher opinion of humanity and claims the noblest kind of charity.

The period at which he lived and the men of letters with whom he associated have an interest for

us which has increased rather than diminished with the lapse of time. Half a century ago these writers were in less repute than they are now; fifty years hence it may be pretty safely asserted their reputation will not have waned. "A time comes," it has been well said, "to most readers when in the literature of the eighteenth century the mind finds its best repose;" and it is surely well to turn aside occasionally from the absorbing interest and often irritating suggestiveness of modern literature to a period that can be surveyed with the complacency and calmness with which we look upon the portrait of a venerable ancestor. Defects there may be in the picture, but they are viewed without annoyance; and we find no inclination to quarrel with the critic who may point out a mole upon the cheek or a cast in the eye.

The Queen Anne essayists and poets, with one or two doubtful exceptions, do not impress us with a sense of greatness. They are pigmies by the side of the Elizabethan heroes; they are inferior in the highest literary qualities to several illustrious men who have lived and died in our own century. The names of Tickell, Prior, Gay, Thomson, and Steele may readily be matched by some popular modern authors; and even the noble trio Addison, Swift, and



Pope, each of whom in his own department we are accustomed to regard as unrivalled, cannot be justly compared, for breadth of intellect and splendour of imagination, with the poets and men of letters who flourished in the sixteenth century.

A great man, however, is not necessarily the most pleasant of companions. Milton is a sublime poet, but we are not quite sure that a week spent in his company would have been remembered with unalloyed pleasure. Coleridge, it is just possible, might have wearied us with his unceasing talk; and Wordsworth, though a good man and a noble poet, did not, we must believe, always act the part of a host with entire satisfaction to his guests. It is not given to every distinguished man to make himself, like Sir Walter Scott, as much beloved as he is admired; and it is not every writer, however admirable and accomplished, who can make his readers his friends, and bring them, as it were, into cousinly relationship with himself. This is what Addison and Steele have done, and this is why we feel so much at home in their company. Goodness, Milton tells us, is awful; but Addison's goodness has in it a grace and sweetness, a gentleness and almost womanliness of tone which forbids the sense of awe.

Steele, who, to quote Johnson's felicitous phrase,

was "the most agreeable rake that ever trod the rounds of indulgence," was far from being the model of a Christian hero; but he was one of the most humane of men, most lovable, most tender-hearted. If he hurt himself by his follies, he did his best to help others by his wisdom; and that wisdom of a genial kind blends with the humour of his essays no one will doubt who has learnt to enjoy them thoroughly.

Sir Richard Steele—or let us style him Dick Steele, for a title sits awkwardly upon this affectionate and loosely-built man—calls up a host of memories in readers conversant with his age. A literary artist who would represent him properly requires a large canvas. He is himself a striking personage; and it is scarcely possible to picture him alone, so closely is he associated with the wits of the time. His figure is seen in every variety of position as we examine the literary and dramatic history of the period. Nor are his familiar features wanting in the political world. His talents were of the most varied description, and his intellectual energy was to be matched only by the amazing persistence and courage of his contemporary Defoe.

The late Mr. Forster, borrowing the phrase apparently from Leigh Hunt, has termed Steele "the sprightly father of the English Essay." This, beyond



question, is his highest literary honour. He created a new kind of literature, and proved himself a master of the happy style which he invented. He did far more than this. It is scarcely too much to say that we owe Addison to Steele. If Steele had not hit upon this mine, Addison might never have displayed his exquisite skill in converting the rough ore into delicate and lovely specimens of workmanship. Without the 'Tatler' and 'Spectator' Addison would be to us in the present day little better than a name. We could not read his English poetry; we could not tolerate his 'Cato,' or applaud his 'Rosamond'; and, although competent scholars might still praise his Latin verses, he would have secured no permanent place in literature. Had Steele possessed a less generous nature he must have felt jealous of his powerful auxiliary; but he was too true a friend, and had a disposition too healthy, to be the victim of so mean a passion. It is only in recent days that the attempt has been made to praise one of the friends at the expense of the other. In his well-known and admirably-written essay on Addison, Lord Macaulay did his utmost, many years ago, to detract from the merit of Steele; and considering that everybody in that day read Macaulay's Essays, and that few comparatively read the essays of Steele,

the latter came to be spoken of by those who knew nothing about him in a half-indulgent, half-contemptuous manner. Steele was regarded as a poor sort of fellow, whose chief honour in life was the friendship of Addison. That great moralist, it was said, might justly have renounced such a scapegrace, but he was too generous to cast off his old schoolfellow "when he diced himself into a sponging-house or drank himself into a fever." It was inevitable, according to these critics, that so good and wise a man as Addison should feel a contempt for Steele; but it is to his honour that he clung to him notwithstanding, and tried, though with little success, to keep him out of scrapes, for the sake of their early friendship at the Charterhouse. An exquisite humourist and great novelist of our day has also, we regret to say, taken the view of Steele which is allied to pity. In Mr. Thackeray's pages Steele is no doubt represented with the utmost good humour and with much appreciation; but he is alluded to as "poor Steele," or "poor Dick Steele," is patted kindly on the back, and has his frailties exposed so as to awaken the feeling of compassion.

Now we do not think that this is quite the way in which this remarkable man should be regarded. We doubt greatly whether he needed pity in his

lifetime, for he was blessed with a hopeful courageous nature, which no disappointment could for long depress and no difficulty daunt; and we doubt still more, considering his achievements and how much Englishmen owe to him, whether we should write of Sir Richard now as of one to be remembered with commiseration. In some respects, indeed, Addison deserves far more of our pity. He lacked the confidence in himself felt by his friend; he was painfully shy—Lord Chesterfield calls him the most timid man he ever saw—he suffered the torture shy men feel in general society; and he had the misfortune to marry a countess. Steele had many failings, and his life witnessed many failures; but he was free from morbid tendencies, and, we venture to think, enjoyed existence more heartily than Addison.

Steele began life unfortunately, for his father died before he was five years old. "I remember," he writes, "I went into the room where his body lay, and my mother sat weeping alone by it. I had my battledore in my hand, and fell a beating the coffin and calling papa; for, I know not how, I had some slight idea that he was locked up there. My mother catched me in her arms, and, transported beyond all patience of the silent grief she was

before in, she almost smothered me in her embraces, and told me, in a flood of tears, 'Papa could not hear me, and would play with me no more; for they were going to put him under ground, whence he could never come to us again.' She was a very beautiful woman, of a noble spirit; and there was a dignity in her grief, amidst all the wildness of her transport, which, methought, struck me with an instinct of sorrow that, before I was sensible of what it was to grieve, seized my very soul, and has made pity the weakness of my heart ever since."

We know little of the boy's early days beyond the fact that while yet very young he was placed at the Charterhouse, and that there began that warm friendship with Addison which, in spite of a temporary interruption, was cherished by Steele and remembered fondly unto his life's end. From that famous school, to which so many illustrious men have been indebted for their earliest training, Steele went up in 1692 to Merton College, Oxford. What means of support he had we do not know, nor do we hear much of his success at the University. While there he showed the bent of his mind by writing a comedy, and the modesty of his nature by burning it in accordance with the judgment of a friend. Anon, the impulsive youth



resolved to be a soldier, and neither the entreaties of his friends, nor the anger of a rich relative who threatened to cut him off with a shilling, could prevent him from enlisting as a private in the Horse Guards. After a time, through the interest of Lord Cutts, he escaped from this ignoble position, "got a company in Lord Lucas's fusiliers, and became Captain Steele."

And now for the first time he appeared before the world as an author. His earliest literary effort was the result of a conflict in his mind similar to that which has been so vividly pictured by John Bunyan. The flesh and the spirit were at war within him, and the flesh got the upper hand. In his desire for amendment he wrote for his private use 'The Christian Hero,' a little treatise not without some literary merit, which Schlosser, the historian of the eighteenth century, writes of at a guess, and condemns without having seen, for he calls the work a poem. The result of the publication was not altogether salutary. Captain Steele could not follow his own precepts, and the contrast between the printed page and the living hero called forth the mirth of his companions. On the other hand, it taught Steele that his true weapon was the pen rather than the sword, for the public liked the book, and within

a few years several editions of the work were called for. About the close of the seventeenth century, Collier produced his celebrated attack on the immorality of the stage. The publication was well timed, and the arguments urged by the Jacobite clergyman were based upon facts too well known to be denied. Steele, whatever might be the vices of his life, never transgressed propriety, or failed to uphold whatever is lovely and of good report, when he pursued his calling as a man of letters. There are, no doubt, passages in his plays and essays that cannot be read aloud in the family; but this is due to the change of manners which forbids our using plain language for plain subjects. Steele is occasionally coarse, and may repel readers who can tolerate, perhaps enjoy, the more alluring pictures of vice painted for them in verse and prose by some living writers; but Steele is never immoral, and his first comedy, 'The Funeral; or, Grief à-la-Mode,' has the merit of affording a striking contrast to the licentious dramas of the Restoration. We shall have something to say farther on about Steele as a playwright. It will suffice now to mention the publication of this comedy as an incident in his life. Its success was considerable, and the writer amazes us by the statement that it attracted the attention of

King William III., a monarch whose fine qualities did not include a knowledge of literature or an interest in men of letters. Steele's next play, 'The Tender Husband,' was dedicated to Addison, who wrote the prologue, which has little to commend it. Here, as elsewhere, the affectionate nature of the author is displayed. He observes that his purpose in the dedication is only to show the esteem he has for his friend, and how he looks upon the intimacy existing between them as one of the most valuable enjoyments of his life. Steele, by the way, understood the art of making compliments better than any man of his age, and the secret of his success may be traced to his sincerity. He felt what others only feigned. One striking instance of this honesty, combined with exquisite art, is to be seen in the dedication of one of his books to Dr. Garth, the physician praised by Pope.

"As soon," he writes, "as I thought of making the 'Lover' a present to one of my friends, I resolved, without further distracting my choice, to send it to the 'Best-natured Man.' You are so universally known for this character, that an epistle so directed would find its way to you without your name; and I believe nobody but you yourself would deliver such a superscription to any other person."

'The Lying Lover; or, Ladies' Friendship,' was Steele's next play, and he tells us that it was "damned for its piety"—a curious fate for a comedy, and one which must have rejoiced the heart of that witty censor of the stage, Jeremy Collier. With this play, produced in 1704, Steele, vexed probably at his defeat, ceased for many years to write for the stage; and it was not until eighteen years later that he wrote his last and best comedy, 'The Conscious Lovers,' which, if Parson Adams may be believed, is the only play fit for a Christian to see, and as good as a sermon. The interval of five years between the representation of 'The Lying Lover' and the issue of the first number of 'The Tatler,' on April 12, 1709, comprises an interesting period of Steele's life. In 1707 he obtained the post of Gazetteer, which he terms the lowest office of the State, and at the same time he was appointed Gentleman Usher in the household of Prince George of Denmark. Some time before, but we know not how long, he had married the sister of a planter in Barbadoes, who brought him a small fortune; but the lady died a few months after the marriage, and Steele, to relieve his grief or having conquered his regret, married Miss—or, in the phraseology of the time, Mrs.—Mary Scurlock, a lady who is as closely associated with his history as



Stella is with that of Swift, or Mrs. Unwin with Cowper's. The troubled sea upon which they sailed their barque together for more than twelve years has been painted for us quite unwittingly by the hand of a master. In a series of letters and notelets addressed to his wife—intended, it should be remembered, solely for her eye—Steele has expressed himself with the freedom of a lover and a husband. Sometimes the language is that of impulsive affection and doting fondness; sometimes he administers reproof; often he confesses his own follies, and still oftener exhibits them involuntarily. That he admired his wife very greatly, and thought her the most beautiful woman he knew, is evident from these unpremeditated effusions. It is probable also that, when feeling ashamed of himself, he felt at the same time a little afraid of his wife; a woman, to judge from Steele's words, of high principle and good sense, who, it is likely, expressed at times in pretty strong language her annoyance at the extravagance and inconsiderateness of her husband. From some of his expressions it is clear that Mrs. Steele was by no means a weak or compliant wife. She knew her power and exercised it; but the impression we derive from the letters is not unfavourable to the lady's character. The courtship was of very

short duration, and Miss Scurlock, in writing to tell her mother that subject to her consent she has promised speedy marriage, adds: "I cannot recommend the person to you as having a great estate, title, &c., which are generally a parent's chief care; but he has a competency in worldly goods to make easy, with a mind so richly adorned as to exceed an equivalent to the greatest estate in the world in my opinion; in short, his person is what I like; his temper is what I am sure will make you as well as myself perfectly happy, if the respect of a lover, with the tender fondness of a dutiful son, can make you so; and for his understanding and morals I refer you to his 'Christian Hero,' which I remember you seemed to approve." Molly Scurlock, it is evident from this letter, had already made up her mind to marry Steele, and wrote for her parent's consent as a matter of form. Inquiries about him she says are needless, for she has made them already; she is certain she will never meet with a prospect of happiness if this should vanish, and fate she believes has ordained him hers.

One at least of Steele's faults was revealed to Miss Scurlock before marriage. On the morning of August 30, 1707, Steele wrote her a pious letter, in which he inculcates resignation to the will of God,



and tells his "fair one" to look up to that Heaven which has made her so sweet a companion; in the evening of that day he wrote another note in a different but equally characteristic strain:

"DEAR, LOVELY MRS. SCURLOCK,

"I have been in very good company, where your health, under the character of *the woman I loved best*, has been often drunk; so that I may say I am dead drunk for your sake, which is more than, I *die for you*.

"RICH. STEELE."

About a week after this strange love-letter, Steele and his Molly appear to have been privately married, but to have lived apart until Mrs. Scurlock arrived in London from Carmarthen and gave her consent to the union. According to a letter addressed to his mother-in-law Steele was at this time in the receipt of a considerable income, yet it is clear the marriage had not been long consummated before the "dearest being on earth" discovered that her husband was involved in pecuniary difficulties. There are early signs that she was uncomfortable, and that he was eager in his own defence. Before they had been married a year bickerings took place between them. Words, he says, cannot express the tenderness he feels; but he hints that his dear Prue takes pleasure in tormenting him, and that the disturbance between them is his greatest affliction. Two or three quarrels

more, he writes, will despatch him quite; and he begs her to understand that, while loving her better than the light in his eyes or the life-blood in his heart, he cannot allow her to direct him in the management of his affairs. She writes to him with heat, we read again; but he will not answer her in that style, and what some might regard as a want of love he is resolved to treat as the uneasiness of a doting fondness. While uttering his affection he asks his Prue to write fondly to him in return, and in a few days acknowledges a "pretty letter" which was a perfect pleasure to him.

That the woman had a generous nature is shown from her proposal to adopt Steele's natural daughter, to whom she was introduced not long after the marriage; and if she were often vexed and angered by her husband's recklessness about money matters, the fault might be due to his folly and not to her disposition. Mrs. Steele has been accused by Swift of governing her husband "abominably," and she has been accused by the biographers, of loving money too well. Neither count is proved in the story, as we read it, of Steele's married life. Swift chose to be Steele's enemy, and his words about an enemy can never be trusted. The letters in which Steele pours out his heart, sometimes in anger, far oftener



in devoted affection, afford no proof that the writer was governed by his wife. Mrs. Steele expected to be rich and found herself poor. Her husband received large sums of money; but he was constantly hampered with debt, and the household sometimes lacked the common necessaries of life. Under such circumstances the lady probably complained, and possibly with some asperity; but Steele would never have heaped so many endearing epithets on a woman who was all the while ruling him abominably. "Thou art such a foolish, tender thing," he writes, "that there is no living with thee." "My dear little, peevish, beautiful, wise governess, God bless you!" is the affectionate superscription to another letter. She is the "beautifullest object that can present itself" to his eyes; she is his "poor, dear, angry, pleased, pretty, witty, silly, everything Prue;" when thinking of her the tender achings of his heart are not to be imagined, and, when he is "too fuddled" to attend to her orders, she is asked to remember him, notwithstanding, as her "most faithful, affectionate husband." "Dear little woman, take care of thyself, and eat and drink cheerfully," are not the words of a hen-pecked man. Neither are the little reproofs he occasionally administers, as for instance: "I know no happiness

in this life in any degree comparable to the pleasure I have in your person and society. I only beg of you to add to your other charms a fearfulness to see a man that loves you in pain and uneasiness, to make me as happy as it is possible to be in this life." Or again: "I would have you entirely at leisure to pass your time with me in diversions, in books, in entertainments, and no manner of business intrude upon us but at stated times. For though you are made to be the delight of my eyes and food of all my senses and faculties, yet a turn of care and housewifery, and I know not what prepossession against conversation-pleasures, robs me of the witty, the handsome woman to a degree not to be expressed. I will work my brains and fingers to procure us plenty of all things, and demand nothing of you but to take delight in agreeable dresses, cheerful discourses, and gay sights, attended by me."

Mrs. Steele received more than one request of this kind from her enamoured spouse; but she may be forgiven if the knowledge of his amazing extravagance, and the struggle with household cares that was forced upon her from the first days of their marriage, made such a request distasteful. For how could she care for the luxury of fine dresses and gay sights, with the recollection that the next day's post

or messenger might contain the information that there was not "an inch of candle, a pound of coal, or a bit of meat in the house"? The happiest news Steele could send her was the promise of amendment and "always to have a quarter in advance;" and of this he was well aware, for after making such a promise he adds: "I know this is better talk to you than if it were a paper of wit written by your beloved Cowley." Unfortunately Mrs. Steele's experience soon told her that it was a promise very likely to be broken. Mr. Forster, whose masterly defence of Steele as a man of letters affords an excellent corrective to the depreciation of Macaulay, has, we think, mistaken to some extent the relationship existing between Steele and his wife. He considers that the notes he was in the habit of writing at all seasons and by all opportunities are a proof that Mrs. Steele exacted from him this confidence; and he even regards her careful preservation of his smallest note not as a sign of affection, but as a token that she was "thrifty and prudent of everything that told against him." There are, perhaps, intimations in Steele's letters that may admit of this construction. A man writing to his wife, without the thought that his words will ever be seen by a

third person, is not likely to be careful of his language; but the correspondence, as a whole, refutes, to our thinking, Mr. Forster's statement, and makes it more reasonable to believe that Mrs. Steele's preservation of the "smallest note" was a sign of her affection, and not the malicious act of a censorious wife eager to preserve the records of her husband's shortcomings.

Before quitting these letters, which reveal to us more of Steele's character than all other sources of information put together, we should like to draw the reader's attention to the passages in which the affectionate father writes about his children. They prove, if such proof were needed, the truth of Dr. Young's assertion, that Steele had the best nature in the world. "Miss Moll," he writes, "grows a mighty beauty, and she shall be very prettily dressed, as likewise shall Betty and Eugene; and if I throw away a little money in adorning my brats I hope you will forgive me." This was a fault readily to be pardoned. One cannot but wish, as no doubt his wife did, that this had been the only way in which Steele threw away his money. In another letter he says: "Moll is the noisiest little creature in the world, and as active as a boy.

Madame Betty is the gravest of matrons in her airs and civilities; Eugene a most beautiful and lusty child."*

We read in one letter how Moll has stolen away his very heart; in another how one of the clerks of the Treasury had asked after his "wonderful girl" Betty, who had been cried up by a lady of his acquaintance "for a greater wit than her father—that is not much—but than her mother either." How, again, Betty and Molly spent the Sunday evening with him, and proved very good company; how he treated them with strawberries and cream, and, according to his "fond way," ate more than both of them; how his five-year-old boy Eugene is "very merry in rags," but is to have new things immediately; how he grows a delightful child,

* Betty, it is interesting to remember, had Addison for one of her godfathers, and Wortley Montague for the second. She married a Judge, the Hon. John Trevor, afterwards Lord Trevor, and seems to have suffered, like her father, from impecuniosity. Like other beautiful young women, she suffered also, before making her final choice, from the importunities of lovers; and among the rivals "two fools," as she was accustomed to call them, fought a duel for her "at the Bath." She was the only one of Steele's four children who lived to a good age. Richard, the eldest, died in childhood. Mary fell into a consumption, and died unmarried, not long after the death of Steele. Eugene had died several years before; so that Sir Richard, like his most illustrious literary contemporaries, left no male descendant.

and "at the present writing is mighty well employed in tumbling on the floor of the room and sweeping the sand with a feather;" how Steele has resolved to make the three children his partners, and "will constantly lay up something out of all receipts of money for each of them in a box bearing the name of the little one to whom it belongs;" and how Bess sends her duty and promises to be her mother's comfort. "The brats, my girls," he adds, "stand on each side the table, and Molly says that what I am writing now is about her new coat. Bess is with me till she has new clothes. Miss Moll has taken upon her to hold the sand-box, and is so impertinent in her office that I cannot write more. But you are to take this letter as from your three best friends."

These are loving words, the outcome of a loving heart; and while reading them we think that there was no man of that age we should better like to have known than "dear, good, faulty Steele."

The published letters stretch over many years of Steele's life; and we must now return to the period when the earliest of these letters was written, and note some of the more prominent facts in the career of the writer. The marriage, as we have said, took

place in 1707; and it was not long before Mrs. Steele discovered that her husband, to use a very gentle expression, had miscalculated his income. On the strength of his representations the happy couple made at the outset a rather dashing appearance. Steele took a house in Bury Street, St. James's, and a country house at Hampton Court, where lived his friend Lord Halifax. They kept their coach and pair. Mrs. Steele had a saddle-horse; and, the expenses of two establishments being more than Steele could manage, he escaped the difficulty by borrowing 1000*l.* from his friend Addison. This sum he was able to return; but there was no cessation to his self-made troubles, and many strange stories are told of his shifts and subterfuges to avoid the urgency of creditors. Two of these stories, which refer to a later period of Steele's life, will be familiar to most readers, for they are related by Dr. Johnson in his celebrated biography of Savage; but they are too characteristic of Steele to be omitted even in this slight sketch of his career. Savage, so runs the first anecdote, accompanied Sir Richard in his chariot, very early one morning, to a mean tavern near Hyde Park Corner. A private room was secured, and Steele dictated a pamphlet to his amanuensis. The brother wits dined together, and

after dinner the dictation continued, until the work was done.

"Mr. Savage then imagined his task over, and expected that Sir Richard would call for the reckoning and return home; but his expectations deceived him, for Sir Richard told him that he was without money, and that the pamphlet must be sold before the dinner could be paid for. And Savage was therefore obliged to go and offer their new production for sale for two guineas, which with some difficulty he obtained. Sir Richard then returned home, having retired that day only to avoid his creditors, and composed the pamphlet only to discharge his reckoning."

The second anecdote, told by Savage, also bears the semblance of truth. Steele invited to his house a great many persons of the first quality. They were surprised at seeing a considerable number of men in livery, and, in the freedom of after-dinner conversation, this surprise was expressed.

"Sir Richard very frankly confessed they were fellows of whom he would very willingly be rid. And, being then asked why he did not discharge them, declared that they were bailiffs, who had introduced themselves with an execution, and whom, since he could not send them away, he had thought it convenient to embellish with liveries, that they might do him credit while they stayed." *

* Steele, adds Johnson, intended to marry Savage to his illegitimate daughter, with a dowry of 1000*l.*; but, "as he was never able to raise the sum which he had offered, the marriage was delayed." Steele, one can readily believe, had a fellow-feeling for the hopelessly perverse man whose facility in getting rid of the money he acquired even exceeded his own. But Savage, unlike his patron, was a squanderer of friendship as well as of money. He

Dr. Thomas Rundle (the "Rundle has a heart" of Pope), in drawing the character of Steele before his death, observed that "so many follies and so much worth were never blended together in any single person before," and that his carelessness in the management of money often compelled him to basenesses for which he hated himself. He adds:

"But still the want of money returned, and with it all the mean shifts to extricate himself from the fatigue of lying to his creditors. . . . . He seemed to want gold only to give it away; his busy mind pursued project after project, in hopes to be rich, that by it he might be more eminently serviceable to his friends and his country. He embraced every appearance that flattered this public-spirited avarice, though the proposal was ever so wanton and improbable. In hopes of getting immense wealth, he ran after every whim, and so first aimed at the Philosopher's Stone; and when that would not do, he could condescend to be thought the author of the humble discovery of a new-fashioned hoop-petticoat; but still 'twas with the sacred view of serving his country by his riches. . . . . He was often within a day of being the richest and therefore the honestest man in England."

Addison held the same opinion of his friend as that entertained by Rundle. Steele, upon one occasion, gave a banquet to more than two hundred persons, which was concluded with an epilogue written by Addison. The first few lines are characteristic,

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ridiculed Steele at the very time he was living on his bounty; and Sir Richard, as Dr. Johnson allows, must be acquitted of severity in withdrawing the allowance he had paid him, and refusing him admittance to his house.

and all the more so since they could not have been spoken without Steele's approval:

> "The sage, whose guests you are to-night, is known
> To watch the public weal, though not his own;
> Still have his thoughts uncommon schemes pursued,
> And teem'd with projects for his country's good.
> Early in youth his enemies have shown
> How narrowly he miss'd the Chemic Stone.
> Not Friar Bacon promised England more."

Of Steele's unthriftiness, in which he resembles his famous countrymen Oliver Goldsmith and Richard B. Sheridan, enough has been said. Of his versatility as a projector, one or two instances will be given in the course of our narrative; of his hopes and fears as a politician, much also might be written. Every morning he awoke full of new projects; every evening, in spite of numberless failures, he went to bed with the conviction that the morrow would bring a realisation of his wishes, and this hope kept him cheerful under circumstances which would have sapped the energy of ordinary men.

Two years after his marriage, on April 12, 1709, and without the knowledge of Addison, Steele published the first number of 'The Tatler.' The significance of this event could have been foreseen by no one. Steele did not know, and none of his readers knew, that from this small seed would spring many

a goodly tree, bright with flowers and wealthy in fruit, and that foliage, blossoms, and fruit would be unlike aught that had been grown hitherto in the garden of our literature. The name of Isaac Bickerstaff had achieved notoriety from the famous joke played by Swift upon the astrologer and almanac maker Partridge, who, although done to death and decently buried by the great wit, would not believe in his own decease. Steele took advantage of the popularity created by Swift's invention, and announced his journal as 'The Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.' The paper was published three times a week, the days on which the post left London, and contained, besides amusing sketches of character, "accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment," and poetical criticisms, a portion devoted to foreign and domestic news. The looseness of plan suited the habits of Steele, and afforded scope for his genius. His versatility and his mercurial nature made prolonged labour distasteful; but he had wit, and readiness, and lively fancy, a quickness of perception and a facility in composition, which eminently fitted him for the task he had selected. Addison detected Steele's hand in the sixth number, and afforded him some slight assistance from that time; it was not, however, until

about eighty numbers had appeared that he became a frequent contributor. For some months almost all the writing, as well as the editing, of the work devolved upon Steele. It would seem that he was not a little careless in the revision of the proofs; but readers in those days were easily satisfied, and the niceties of composition were as much disregarded as a uniform system of spelling. Pope in verse, and Addison in prose, were the literary reformers of the age; and the latter, after a century and a half, retains his fame, not only as a moralist and humourist, but as a consummate master of language. Steele wrote with strong feeling and healthy enthusiasm, with much pathos and a varied knowledge of life; but he often wrote incorrectly, and his sentences are sometimes so oddly put together as to obscure the meaning.* The depreciation he has received from critics is due, we believe, in great measure, to the looseness of his style; but it may be observed, while acknowledging Steele's weakness in this respect, that frequently, and almost always when moved

* Here is a striking instance of Steele's slovenliness in composition extracted from 'The Spinster': "No one will make and provide at home what will hinder a family from doing what would purchase a great deal more than what would buy the same thing from abroad; and, on the contrary, no one will go abroad for what they can have for less cost and labour at home."



by the pathos of his subject, the writer's language is simple, forcible, and appropriate. The best of Steele's papers in 'The Tatler' are excelled by Addison alone, and there is a sprightliness and simplicity of tone about them which make them delightful reading. The essayist came to his work well furnished, he carried it on with infinite vivacity, and in spite of the help rendered him by his illustrious friend, the colour of the work, if the term may be allowed, comes from the hand of Steele. As the teller of slight and pathetic tales he is superior to Addison, and in criticism he takes a place by Addison's side. "What a good critic he was!" exclaimed Landor. "I doubt if he has ever been surpassed." Steele was indeed born for literature far more than for politics, for which his chief qualifications were a directness and manliness of purpose, and a love of country as pure and chivalrous as the love he felt for women. For business and commercial speculations he had little genius, and his rashness forced him into many a foolish scheme at the cost of time and money that might have been spent more profitably.

The only post held by Steele when he started on his career of essayist was that of official Gazetteer. After a while he was made Commissioner of Stamps;

but when the Tories came into office, Steele, whose Whiggery had become obnoxious, lost his previous appointment. On January 2, 1711, Swift writes to Stella: "Steele's last 'Tatler' came out to-day. You will see it before this comes to you, and how he takes leave of the world. He never told so much as Mr. Addison of it, who was as much surprised as I. . . . . To my knowledge he had several good hints to go upon, but was so lazy and weary of the work he would not improve them."

Steele was impulsive, but he was not lazy, and two months after the exit of 'The Tatler' appeared the first number of 'The Spectator.' Addison was consulted this time. The two friends formed the plan of the papers in consort, and, according to Bishop Hurd, the characters that comprise the celebrated club were the common work of both. This may be true, but it is certain that the second number, in which the different characters of the club are sketched, was written by Steele, and that we are indebted to his pen for our first introduction to the immortal Sir Roger de Coverley. Miss Aikin, with the curious habit of depreciating Steele in vogue amongst writers, regards it as "a singular circumstance" that the first hints of this character should have been thrown out by him; as



if the versatile fancy and happy art of character-drawing that had so long sustained 'The Tatler' were incapable of picturing the humourous knight! The portrait is a mere sketch, but the few lines that form it show the hand of a master. There was a time when every educated person was familiar with 'The Spectator,' and when an allusion to a paper would have sufficed without quotation. But time, though it cannot destroy our finest literature, is apt to rust it. Even Sir Roger himself is known by name only, to many well-informed readers, and the short passage we shall quote may have the recommendation of novelty:

"It is said he keeps himself a bachelor by reason he was crossed in love by a perverse beautiful widow of the next county to him. Before this disappointment, Sir Roger was what you call a fine gentleman, had often supped with my Lord Rochester and Sir George Etherege, fought a duel upon his first coming to town, and kicked Bully Dawson in a public coffee-house for calling him youngster. But being illused by the above-mentioned widow, he was very serious for a year and a half; and though, his temper being naturally jovial, he at last got over it, he grew careless of himself, and never dressed afterwards. He continues to wear a coat and doublet of the same cut that were in fashion at the time of his repulse, which, in his merry humours, he tells us, has been in and out twelve times since he first wore it. . . . . He is now in his fifty-sixth year, cheerful, gay, and hearty; keeps a good house both in town and country; a great lover of mankind; but there is such a mirthful cast in his behaviour that he is rather beloved than esteemed. His



tenants grow rich, his servants look satisfied; all the young women profess to love him, and the young men are glad of his company; when he comes into a house, he calls the servants by their names, and talks all the way upstairs to a visit. I must not omit that Sir Roger is a justice of the quorum; that he fills the chair at a quarter-session with great abilities, and three months ago gained universal applause by explaining a passage in the Game Act."

The art with which Addison afterwards treats the knight is inimitable; but it should be always remembered that the first representation of Sir Roger is due to Steele, who seems throughout Addison's career to have paved the way for his successes. 'The Spectator' was wonderfully popular. All the town became familiar with it; it was found on every breakfast table; fine ladies who knew nothing of literature followed the prevailing fashion, and learnt to talk about Will Honeycomb and Will Wimble, and to laugh at the eccentricities of Sir Roger. The circulation was enormous for an age in which books and papers were usually food for a circle of wits, instead of being, as in our day, a common necessary of life. Both in numbers and in volumes the famous essays sold by thousands, and the surprise of Steele must have been as great as his pleasure. Nevertheless after a while he grew restless and impatient, and at the close of 1712 brought his journal to an end. This



was done, as in the former case, without consultation with Addison; and when two or three months later Steele commenced 'The Guardian,' he did so without communicating with his friend. The reasons for this reticence are not obvious, but the fact is noteworthy as exhibiting Steele's confidence in his own judgment and resources. He was always glad to receive literary aid from Addison, but in no instance does he seem to have acted as if dependent upon it. Addison was at work upon his 'Cato,' and contributed nothing to the first volume of 'The Guardian'; but Steele's name and reputation were now established, and the first men of the day were glad to fight under his banner. Bishop Berkeley, one of the noblest and purest of characters in an age that was far from being noble or pure, wrote fourteen papers;* Pope, whose 'Essay on Criticism' had lately placed him in the front rank among the writers of his time, contributed eight essays, one of which on the pastorals of Philips acquired no small notoriety; Philips himself wrote a paper upon song-writing; Gay, Parnell, Rowe, Hughes, Budgell, and Tickell also contributed; and after a time Addison was able to return to his alliance, and to write above fifty numbers, while upwards of eighty came from

* For each paper his honorarium was a guinea and a dinner with Steele.



the prolific pen of the editor. For a third time Steele achieved a great literary success, and for a third time he suddenly put an end to his work before it had exhibited any symptoms of decay. It would seem that literature had for the moment lost its charms, and that Steele was eager to enter upon the arena of politics, for no sooner had 'The Guardian' vanished than he announced the publication of 'The Englishman.' *

Steele was a staunch adherent to the principles of the Revolution, and like his illustrious contemporary Defoe, professed an ardent admiration of King William. He had promised at the outset that 'The

* A full account of Steele's various periodicals, and of the serials produced by writers who followed the track he had thrown open to them, would occupy many pages; but it is worth noting how frequently Steele shifted his ground, and how ready he was to commence a new journal. Thus, for instance, 'The Englishman' was stopped at the completion of the fifty-seventh number, and on the same day or the day previously 'The Lover' was started. This paper, published three times weekly, lasted from February 25 to May 27; but a month before it was dropped Steele had issued 'The Reader,' which expired at its ninth number. 'The Theatre' lived for three months. 'Town Talk' was dropped, like 'The Reader,' at its ninth number; but before throwing this aside 'The Tea Table' appeared, and this was followed immediately by 'Chit Chat,' both of these papers having an ephemeral existence. The titles selected by Steele for his journals were appropriated, with some modifications, by a number of contemporary essayists. 'The Tory Tatler,' 'The Northern Tatler,' 'The Fairy Tatler,' 'The Political Tatler,' 'The Country Spectator,' 'The Female Spectator,' are a few titles among many which serve to remind us of the popularity achieved by Steele's famous publications.



Guardian' should be kept free from party, a difficult task in that age, and with such an editor; but a task, nevertheless, that had been accomplished in 'The Spectator.' The restraint, however, proved too severe, and indignation at what Steele considered the treacherous conduct of Swift led him to denounce his former friend, and to attack the Tory principles of 'The Examiner.' Steele, hot-headed and plain-spoken, writes in a passion, while Swift replies with singular calmness and moderation; but his apparent sincerity failed to remove the suspicions of Steele, and the breach between the two men became irreparable. By the Treaty of Utrecht it was stipulated that the harbour and works at Dunkirk should be destroyed. A strong effort was made to set aside this article of the treaty; and Steele, indignant at the attempt, argued vigorously against the memorial that had been sent to the Queen, and observed "that the British nation expect the immediate demolition of Dunkirk." Upon this 'The Examiner' laid against him a charge of disloyalty, calling the language of the writer abominable, and himself a villain. The amenities of party warfare were not understood in those days; and it was quite proper for a political adversary to term a man a rascal and a "contemptible wretch" whose views about the

Treaty of Utrecht did not agree with his own. The times were out of joint; in Steele's judgment the great principles of the Revolution were at stake; and inspired, it is not to be doubted, by patriotic feelings, he rushed with characteristic ardour into the thick of the fray. In October, 1713, 'The Englishman' was started; five months later Steele took his seat in Parliament as member for Stockbridge, and delivered his maiden speech on the first night of the session. Before this he had printed a political pamphlet called 'The Crisis,' on the Hanoverian succession and the perils of the time, which caused much excitement, and was termed by the Tories an inflammatory libel. Steele did not spare his words in this defence of Whig principles; and no sooner had he taken his seat in the House of Commons than he was accused of encouraging sedition, and called upon for his defence. Addison was near his friend on that memorable occasion, and on either side of him sat Robert Walpole and General Stanhope. His speech occupied three hours, and proved, in the judgment of temperate men, that his integrity of purpose was not to be questioned, and that his powers of oratory were of no mean order.

When Steele had left the House several mem-



bers spoke in his defence; among others, Lord Finch, the eldest son of the Earl of Nottingham. Some time before Lady Charlotte Finch (afterwards Duchess of Somerset) had been attacked in 'The Examiner' for "knotting in St. James's Chapel during divine service in the immediate presence both of God and Her Majesty, who were affronted together." Steele, indignant at this public attack upon a lady, had replied with some asperity in 'The Guardian,' and "rescued innocence from calumny." Like Steele, Lord Finch was a new member; and, when Steele was assailed for party purposes, the young nobleman sprang to his legs for the first time in defence of the man who had done his sister a kindness. His generous impulse seemed for the moment more generous than wise. The speaker hesitated, was overcome by timidity, and sat down exclaiming, "It is strange I cannot speak for this man, though I could readily fight for him." A cheer filled the House at these loyal words, and Lord Finch, with his courage revived, rose a second time, and is said to have made a capital speech. It was a gallant, but vain effort, for Steele lost his seat by a large majority. This expulsion of a member for opinions expressed before election was perhaps the first instance, according to Hallam, "wherein the

House of Commons so identified itself with the executive administration, independently of the Sovereign's person, as to consider itself libelled by those who impugned its measures."

For a brief moment, then, Steele lost his seat; but the triumph of his opponents was short-lived. Steele was expelled the House in March; on August 1 Queen Anne died; the chiefs of the Tory party were imprisoned or forced into exile, and Steele was now assured that the moment of his good fortune had arrived. The benefits conferred on him, however, were not remarkable. He was made Surveyor of the Royal Stables, was placed in the Commission of the Peace for Middlesex, and, on presenting an address from the county, obtained the honour of knighthood. These were small boons; but one post of some value fell to Steele, which he was eminently qualified to fill. Nobody, as we learn from Colley Cibber, was better liked by the players; and, when the license of Drury Lane Theatre had expired, they asked Steele to use his interest for its renewal, and to accept the supervision of the theatre with an income of 700*l.* a year. The managers were forced by Government to pay this salary to somebody, and whom could they elect better than Sir Richard? "We knew," writes the good-humoured Cibber, "the



obligations the stage had to his writings, there being scarce a comedian of merit in our whole company whom his 'Tatlers' had not made better by his public recommendation of them, and many days had our house been particularly filled by the influence and credit of his pen;" and he adds that Steele was so highly pleased with the offer made to him "that, had we been all his own sons, no unexpected act of filial duty could have more endeared us to him." How honourably Sir Richard behaved during the negotiations respecting the patent of the theatre is told at some length by Cibber, and redounds to the praise of both.

And now Steele entered Parliament once more as member for Boroughbridge, in Yorkshire, and is said to have been successful as a speaker. If courage, honesty of purpose, and a vivacious intellect could make a member successful in the most fastidious of all assemblies, he was not likely to fail. Two years later, on the suppression of the rebellion in 1717, he was sent to Scotland as a Commissioner for Forfeited Estates; and it is a fact worth noting that, in order to improve himself in the knowledge of the French language, he took a Frenchman with him as a companion. The expedition was to have been made in the saddle; and Steele, writing to his wife, who was

then in Wales, observes, "I have been much upon horseback to prepare me for my journey." In a later letter he informs her that he is on the point of starting "with an opportunity of a gentleman's coach going on;" but there "were many resolutions and irresolutions concerning his way of going," and there seems to have been a delay of some months before he actually set out. On the return journey it took Steele seven days to travel from Edinburgh to Pearce Bridge, in the county of Durham; but the mode of conveyance is not stated. It would take him, he adds, another week to reach York, and at the close of the third week he hoped to be in London.

The remaining events of Steele's life must be rapidly passed over. It was on his return from Scotland, where he appears to have been received with much consideration, that he invented a fish-pool for bringing live salmon to London from the coast of Ireland. He expected to gain a great fortune by this invention, wrote an elaborate treatise in its favour, and promised the public who might join with him in the venture to divide ten per cent. six times a year. It is scarcely necessary to add that the project proved abortive, and that Steele was laughed at for his credulity. At the close of

the same year Lady Steele died, and was buried in Westminster Abbey—"the best woman that ever man had" is her husband's honest testimony to her worth. A little later occurred the memorable quarrel between Steele and his best friend Addison. The Earl of Sunderland had proposed a Bill for fixing permanently the number of the peerage. Steele saw the evil of the measure, and not only opposed it in Parliament, but actually started a six-penny paper, called 'The Plebeian,' in order to denounce it. To this Addison replied in two pamphlets, entitled 'The Old Whig.' Personalities were exchanged, and thus—to use the words of Johnson, who terms the controversy *Bellum plus quam civile*—"these two illustrious friends, after so many years passed in confidence and endearment, in unity of interest, conformity of opinion, and fellowship of study," parted finally "in acrimonious opposition." There was no time for the reconciliation which one must believe would have taken place eventually; for before another winter came round Addison was dead, and Steele lamented him with unavailing sorrow. Other troubles followed the loss of his oldest friend. Sir Richard had a controversy with that weakest of statesmen, the Duke of Newcastle, then Lord Chamberlain; his theatrical patent was

revoked, and the pecuniary loss, according to Steele's reckoning, amounted to 9800*l.* John Dennis, the critic, with his wonted malignity, took advantage of Sir Richard's depression to libel and traduce him; and yet Steele, with his impulsive generosity, had actually at one time suffered arrest from having become security for this ill-conditioned man. "S'death! why did he not keep out of the way, as I did!" was the cool remark that fell from Dennis, when he heard the news.

On Walpole's return to office, Steele was restored to his position as "Governor of the Royal Company of Comedians," and not long afterwards his last and best comedy, 'The Conscious Lovers,' was brought upon the stage, and proved a decided hit. The public applauded, and the king presented the author with 500 guineas. Despite this appreciation, however, we must confess that we find this play, and all Steele's dramas, extremely dull reading. As an essayist, he was the most natural of writers; as a dramatist, he is the most artificial; his plots are absurd, and his characters possess no verisimilitude. There is not one of them in which it is possible to feel the remotest interest; not one that has acquired a living place in literature. It is a bore to read his dramas, and we are inclined to believe that the



author was mistaken when he said that 'The Lying Lover' was damned for its piety; it must have been for its dulness. A writer of Steele's genius was not likely, indeed, to produce any kind of literary work that would be wanting in ability; and the artful construction of his comedies pleased the playgoers of the age, who cared much more for art than nature. His purpose as a moralist is good throughout, and occasionally, as in 'The Funeral,' we find a happy display of humour; but the principal impression left upon the mind after reading Steele's four plays is one of painful weariness.*

'The Conscious Lovers' appeared on the stage in 1722. A year later, in failing health, and with "a very heavy heart," Steele went to Bath, and while there, as sorrows come in battalions, he received the

* Mr. Ward's opinion of Steele's dramatic art is more favourable; but he observes that his comic genius lacked sustained vigour, and that calling in sentiment to the aid of humour, and taking a hint from Colley Cibber, he "became the real founder of that *sentimental comedy* which exercised so pernicious an influence upon the progress of our dramatic literature." Mr. Ward adds: "It would be unjust to hold him responsible for the feebleness of successors who were altogether deficient in the comic power which he undoubtedly even as a dramatist exhibits; but, in so far as their aberrations were the result of his example, he must be held to have contributed, though with the best of motives, to the decline of the English drama, and in particular of that branch of it to which his plays, after all, essentially belong."—'English Dramatic Literature,' vol. ii. p. 603.

news of his son's death. "Lord, grant me patience!" he exclaims, and there was now large need of it. The wine of life was on the lees; his work was done; and, after spending some time in Hereford, Steele retired to his wife's estate at Carmarthen. He continued to suffer — as he had suffered all his life long—from pecuniary difficulties; and he had also a dispute with the managers of Drury Lane, which estranged him from his former friends. We hear, too, of a paralytic seizure; but the date of it is uncertain, nor do we know how these last sad years of retirement were passed.

The end came in 1729; and we bid farewell to a man who, although far indeed from faultless, possessed a fine intellect, a tender heart, and a generous disposition, that keep his memory fragrant still. How much Steele accomplished for English literature will be best understood by those who are familiar with the age in which he lived; and the more we become acquainted with it, the higher will be our estimation of the man who, with the help of his friend Addison, reformed the morals and manners of society, and showed how possible it was to employ the wit and humour that had been so often prostituted to vice in the service of virtue and religion.

THE WARTONS.

THE brothers Joseph and Thomas Warton were conspicuous figures among the men of letters who flourished under that most unliterary of monarchs, King George III. The elder was the Master of Winchester and Prebend of St. Paul's; the younger, who was also a clergyman, occupied the post held earlier in the century by his father, of Professor of Poetry. He was, moreover, Camden Professor of History, and succeeded Whitehead as Laureate. Both the brothers were Oxford men, and Thomas, who never married, resided at the University more than forty-seven years; both were small poets, Thomas being by far the better singer of the twain, both were poetical critics, both were men of high culture, but neither of them, it may be said, has left an ineffaceable mark in literature. The work they did is for the most part done well, but none of it supremely well, and the popularity they enjoyed among their contemporaries passed away with

their lives. It is curious to note how little of biographical interest has come down to us about the Wartons. Their memoirs were written by learned but dull men, who did not know that the object of a biographer ought to be to produce a vivid and genuine representation of his hero; and thus, instead of giving us a finished portrait of the brothers, we find it scarcely possible to catch the outline of their features.

The Rev. John Wooll undertook, six years after Joseph Warton's death, to write the biography of his late friend and master, and to publish a selection from his works. Accordingly in 1806 appeared, after the fashion of those days, a bulky quarto volume, printed in admirable type, and with wide margins. To it we owe a few facts for which we are bound to be thankful, and it must be acknowledged that the writer's views of a biographer's duties are carried out in the most exemplary manner. "To descend," he says, "to the minutiæ of daily habits is surely beneath the province of biography," and he intimates that all letters of a domestic character are suppressed, and that the reader will be disappointed "should he expect a detail of those peculiarities and trifling incidents which are by some indiscriminately termed strokes



of character." Wooll observes, and no doubt justly, that a good deal of injury may be inflicted on a man by his biographer; but he does not see that it is possible to deal gently and wisely with a person's weaknesses and foibles, and at the same time to produce a characteristic portrait.

Biographers have sinned frequently, no doubt, in trenching on sacred ground, but this is no reason why the memoir-writer should confine himself to the statement of a few barren facts. To know where a man lived, what offices he filled, what books he wrote, whom and how often he married, is not to know the man. Yet this is the principal information, useful no doubt in its way, supplied by the Rev. John Wooll. What of it is needful for us to state may be put into a few paragraphs.

Joseph, who came into the world six years before Thomas, and died ten years after him, was born in 1722, and educated at Winchester and at Oriel College, Oxford, where his skill as a poetaster appears to have been first exhibited. At the age of twenty-two he was ordained, and three years afterwards was presented by the Duke of Bolton to the rectory of Wynslade, when he married the lady to whom he had been for some time attached. The Duke expected a service in return for the favour he

had conferred, and one which any clergyman worthy of the name would have declined with scorn. "In the year 1751," writes the biographer,

> "Warton was called from the indulgence of connubial happiness and the luxury of literary retirement to attend his patron to the south of France, for which invitation the Duke had two motives: the society of a man of learning and taste, and the accommodation of a Protestant clergyman, who immediately on the death of his Duchess, then in a confirmed dropsy, could marry him to the lady with whom he lived, and who was universally known and distinguished by the name of Polly Peachum."

Wooll allows that the object of this expedition was "not the most eligible in a professional view," but praises Warton, notwithstanding, for his laudable wish to improve his income. The connection appears to have terminated abruptly, since, before reaching Italy, Warton left the Duke and his mistress and returned to England. Warton now produced his edition of 'Virgil,' gaining thereby a considerable reputation for scholarship. In this edition he published Pitt's translation of the 'Æneid' and attempted himself a translation of the 'Eclogues' and 'Georgics,' which proved that, though an elegant scholar, he was not a poet. Pitt's chief fault as a translator, says Mr. Connington, who of all modern critics was the best qualified to judge, "is



a general mediocrity of expression. Warton was heavier and more prosaic than Pitt, without being much less conventional. His ear was worse, his command of poetical language more restricted. Yet he sighs in his dedication over the necessity of using coarse and common words in his translation of the 'Georgics,' viz. *plough* and *sow, wheat, dung, ashes, horse,* and *cows,* &c., words which he fears will unconquerably disgust many a delicate reader. When Virgil rises Warton does not rise with him; his version of the 'Pollio' and of the 'Praises of Italy' may be read without kindling any spark of enthusiasm."

He also wrote some papers for the 'Adventurer,' a popular periodical, edited by Hawkesworth, some of them containing, in the judgment of his biographer, inimitable criticisms on Shakespeare. Of these essays the best are devoted to critical topics; but it was asserted at the time, and not without justice, that Warton exhibited his learning too freely in a periodical designed for general reading. In some of the papers there is an attempt at humour, which in these days would be considered heavy. "Characters at Bath" and "Letters of Six Characters" for instance, were no doubt regarded by

the writer as lively, or even witty, but we suspect that they will strike the modern reader as dull and laboured pieces.

Thanks, perhaps, to his 'Virgil,' Warton was elected second master of Winchester School, and while in this position produced the first volume of his ponderous 'Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope,' a quarter of a century passing before the publication of the second. Warton was a sound critic, with a just appreciation of some of the more subtle charms of poetry; but his method of criticism, like the method followed by his brother, is pedantic and obsolete. Nothing but curiosity or a peculiar interest in the subject could induce anyone now-a-days to wade through the two volumes which contain his 'Essay on Pope.' It forms an exhibition of the author's learning, a rather wearisome exhibition it must be owned; but it is only just to Warton to observe that Thomas Campbell thought otherwise, and pronounced the essay entertaining. Dr. Johnson also said, and said truly, that "he must be much acquainted with literary history, both of remote and late times, who does not find in this Essay many things which he did not know before." It may be well, moreover, to remember that much which seems



to us familiar and obvious in Warton's criticisms might not have been so evident when the essay was written.

The following passage, for instance, would very likely have struck Warton's first readers as original and suggestive; to readers in our day it will sound utterly trite, and yet, perhaps, not more trite than some passages on the same subject written more than seventy years later by Macaulay*:

"Correctness is a vague term, frequently used without meaning and precision. It is perpetually the nauseous cant of the French critics, and of their advocates and pupils, that the English writers are generally incorrect. If correctness implies an absence of petty faults, this perhaps may be granted. If it means that because their tragedians have avoided the irregularities of Shakespeare, and have observed a juster economy in their fables, therefore the 'Athalie' for instance, is preferable to 'Lear,' the notion is groundless and absurd. Though the 'Henriade' should be allowed to be free from any very gross absurdities, yet who will dare to rank it with the 'Paradise Lost'?"

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* We refer to the celebrated essayist's review of Moore's 'Life of Lord Byron,' in which correctness in poetry is discussed at considerable length. It is probable that Macaulay's remarks were suggested, though perhaps unconsciously, by the observations of Warton. We have space only for one brief quotation: "What is meant by correctness in poetry? If by correctness be meant the conforming to rules which have their foundation in truth and in the principles of human nature, then correctness is only another name for excellence. If by correctness be meant the conforming to rules purely arbitrary, correctness may be another name for dulness and absurdity."

In some respects both the Wartons broke ground which has been since so well cultivated that we are apt to forget how much we owe to them. The very growth the two brothers endeavoured to stimulate has been injurious to their fame, and their criticism fails to impress us, not because it is intrinsically worthless but because we have outlived it. While doing justice to the critical school of poets, and giving due praise to the splendid satire and exquisite fancy of Pope, they asserted that the highest art of the poet could only be expressed by communion and sympathy with nature, and thus they may be regarded as pioneers in the great poetical revolution which gave a new character to our literature at the beginning of the century.

After spending eleven years at Winchester College as assistant master, Joseph Warton, on the resignation of Dr. Burton, was appointed head master, and held that position with singular honour for twenty-seven years. In the height of his prosperity his wife, "whom he still adored with unabated love," died, and left him "the wretched widowed parent of six children." This was in the month of October, 1772. In the following year the wretched parent found it necessary "to soothe his anguish by the admission of new comforts, and to curb the

violence of unavailing and destructive regret,"— which means in plain English that fourteen months after the death of his first wife he resolved to marry a second.

The "Literary Club," of which Dr. Johnson was so proud, numbered Dr. Warton among its members, but his residence at Winchester made him no doubt an infrequent guest. His name, by the way, is rarely mentioned in Boswell's biography, and never, we believe, in connection with the club. Wooll, it is needless to observe, has little to say on the subject, for he regarded it as trifling with the dignity of biography to describe the daily actions or associations of his hero. He does, however, condescend to tell us that Warton spent his Christmas vacation every year in London, tempted by the pleasures of London society and "the rich allurement of the Literary Club. An ardour for military knowledge was a prominent feature in the family character, and it was no uncommon circumstance to see Dr. Warton at breakfast in the St. James's Coffee-house surrounded by officers of the Guards, who listened with the utmost attention and pleasure to his remarks." From the biographer also we learn —and one ought to feel obliged to him for admitting such insignificant particulars — that Warton

was a lover of children and a great admirer of beauty. Mr. Wooll writes that he has often seen "the young, the handsome, and the gay deserted by the belles to attract the notice of Dr. W.; whilst he was on his part thoroughly accessible, and imparted his lively sallies and instructive conversation with the most gallant and appropriate pleasantry." A few additional facts may also be gathered from the memoir. The biographer, for instance, is good enough to inform us that Warton lost a son in 1786; that four years later he lost his brother, to whom he was warmly attached; that it was not until the evening of life he obtained church preferment; that in the summer of 1793 he resigned his post at Winchester; that four years later he produced his edition of Pope in nine volumes; that "he entered on an edition of Dryden," and "was proceeding in his classical and interesting pursuit," when he died in the seventy-eighth year of his age. The edition of Pope, which ought perhaps to have been Warton's most significant achievement, may be well-nigh regarded as an utter failure. What is good in it is simply a republication of what was in the Essay; his fresh matter is for the most part irrelevant and commonplace.

Unfortunately, too, for his reputation the late

Master of Winchester, and Prebend of Winchester and St. Paul's, thought fit to reprint a disgusting chapter of Scriblerus, omitted in all good editions of Pope, which he considered "full of the most exquisite original humour;" and a piece equally offensive, entitled the 'Double Mistress,' which is also praised by him for its "inimitable humour." This was a sin against decency, and, considering Warton's age and position, it is difficult to excuse him. Even his biographer does not attempt to do so.

Neither in early life nor in old age does Warton's conduct appear to have been marked by lofty principle. He was a kind-hearted man, willing to live on the best terms with his associates, but he had not the religious earnestness or the self-abnegation which we expect to find in a Christian minister. By him the Church was viewed probably as a profession rather than a calling, while his chief interest was in literature. It is clear that he liked good cheer and lively company, and spent his days in an easy comfortable sort of way, without allowing his complacency to be disturbed by theological difficulties. When an old man we are told that "his parsonage, his farm, his garden, were cultivated and adorned with the eagerness and taste of undiminished youth," and

that "his lively sallies of playful wit, his rich store of literary anecdote, and the polished and habitual ease with which he imperceptibly entered into the various ideas and pursuits of men in different situations and endowed with educations totally opposite, rendered him an acquaintance both profitable and amusing; whilst his unaffected piety and unbounded charity stamped him a pastor adored by his parishioners." This sounds a little like the conventional style of panegyric permitted to biographers; and without any lack of charity we may venture to say that if Dr. Joseph Warton were "adored" by his parishioners, the feeling was called forth by his liberality rather than by his virtues as a pastor. The letters of a man will sometimes supply an index to his character. Warton's are few in number, and, for the most part, without colour. In one of them he writes of spending two evenings with Fielding and his sister, and of being "inexpressibly diverted;" in another, for the insertion of which the biographer makes a kind of apology, we read of the loss of a "dear little charming girl" in consequence of inoculation; in a third, of a visit to Mason the poet, "the most easy, best-natured, agreeable man I ever met with," and to Matlock Bath, "of all earthly places the most exquisite and

romantic." In another letter he relates that he dined with Dr. Johnson, who seemed cold and indifferent; and of Goldsmith he expresses an unfavourable and, as we believe, an unkindly opinion. "Of all solemn coxcombs, Goldsmith is the first; yet sensible, but affects to use Johnson's hard words in conversation." A letter from Brighton, written about a century ago, also contains one or two noteworthy passages. After stating that he never misses bathing in any weather, and that he has dined with *the* physician of the town, he adds: "We have, amidst other strange characters, a *bathing divine* perpetually clad in silks and satins, and solely employed in playing cards with the furring dowagers and superannuated old maids."

To this slight sketch of Joseph Warton's career it may be added, since it speaks well for the esteem in which he was held, that some of the most notable men of the age were among his friends or correspondents—Johnson, Burke, Garrick, and Bishop Lowth, for example. The esteem, moreover, in which he was held, both as a scholar and a critic, was so great that we are not surprised to find Cowper writing to S. Rose: "If you should happen to fall into company with Dr. Warton again, you will not, I daresay, forget to make him my

spectful compliments, and to assure him that I lt not a little flattered by the favourable mention e was pleased to make of me and of my labours. The poet who pleases a man like him has nothing eft to wish for."

We have said that Dr. Warton was himself a poetaster as well as a critic of poetry, and his biographer ventures to assert that one of the striking beauties of his verse is originality. He could scarcely have made a greater blunder. Whatever excellence may be found in Joseph Warton's poetry is essentially imitative. He writes because others have written, not because he is constrained to write. His versification is skilful, and respectability—an odious word when applied to poetry—is its most prominent feature. There is little in it to find fault with, considering the style of verse acceptable in that age; but there is still less to praise; and when Wooll points out, as he does occasionally, some passage deserving of special approbation, he exhibits his utter incompetence as a critic of poetry. When, for example, the poet (save the mark!), in a fit of melancholy, proposes "to go to charnels and the house of woe,"

> "Or to some abbey's mouldering towers,
> Where to avoid cold wintry showers
> *The naked beggar shivering lies,*"



the editor observes in a note that the line we have marked by italics "is not only an original but wonderfully poetical idea." Like his brother, Joseph Warton gathers much of imagery from Milton, and there are marks, too, in his poetry that Thomson was appreciated. Readers unfamiliar with those masters might be inclined sometimes to call their imitator a very pretty poet, and so he would be if his choicest passages were not stolen, or, to speak of them less offensively, echoes of familiar song. Read, for instance, the 'Ode to Fancy,' one of his best pieces, and you will find that the poem constantly recalls the imagery and versification of Milton. The piece, indeed, is vastly unlike, and it need scarcely be said immensely inferior to the 'L'Allegro' or 'Il Penseroso'; yet lines occur again and again which suggest, if they do not actually copy, the lines of Milton. Not always, however, and we readily admit Warton's originality when he imagines himself stealing a kiss from his Laura—

> "While her ruby lips dispense
> Luscious nectar's quintessence!"

Yet he instantly falls again into the copyist, and adds his hope that Fancy may aid him,

"When young-eyed Spring profusely throws
From her green lap the pink and rose,
When the soft turtle of the dale
To summer tells her tender tale."

Tawdry ornament and conventional phraseology mark many of his pieces; his lines abound in compound words and in the vicious diction so common at a period of our poetical history, when poets were afraid of treating plain subjects in plain language. At the same time it is evident that Joseph Warton strove in his measure (and his brother made a like effort more successfully) to leave the school of Pope for that of nature. The effort was too much for so weak a poet, and he only partially succeeded. There is not a poem written by the elder Warton that has or deserves to have a place in our Anthologies.

The poetry of Thomas Warton is better known, and has been reprinted in two or three modern editions; but his reputation, like his brother's, is chiefly due to his learning and taste as a poetical commentator. The account of his singularly uneventful life is as meagre as that given of his brother. He was born at Basingstoke in 1728, and is said to have exhibited very early an extraordinary love of study. His education was conducted by his



father till he went up to Oxford, where, in his sixteenth year, he was admitted a Commoner of Trinity College. Soon afterwards he was elected a Scholar. His thoughts and aspirations were not confined to college learning. While still a youth in his teens he published a poem called the 'Pleasures of Melancholy,' and two years later, the 'Triumph of Isis.' Mason, the friend of Gray, had written an elegy, called 'Isis,' in which he lamented the degenerate state of Oxford; and young Warton, eager to defend his *alma mater*, produced his 'Triumph' in reply—a highly creditable production considering the writer's age, which secured him at the time considerable applause. Several more poems followed which attracted some attention, while the publication of his 'Observations on the Faery Queene,' in 1753, called forth the generous praise of Dr. Johnson. "You have shown," he wrote, "to all who shall hereafter attempt the study of our ancient authors, the way to success, by directing them to the perusal of the books which those authors had read."* The

* *Apropos* of Warton and the 'Faery Queene,' there is a story told by Boswell in his 'Life of Johnson' of a dispute about Spenser's great poem, between Thomas Warton and Huggins, the translator of 'Ariosto,' in which the latter exclaimed, "I will *militate* no longer against his *nescience*." "Huggins," so writes Boswell, "was master of the subject, but wanted expression; Mr. Warton's

plan chosen by Thomas Warton has been frequently adopted since his day, and was again employed by him in his edition of Milton's early poems. We are not sure that it may not produce, in some cases, a false estimate of a poet. It is comparatively easy to multiply parallel passages and to show how far a great writer has gleaned or appears to have gleaned from his predecessors; but such labour is seldom satisfactory, since it seems to detract from his originality, while it exhibits the acuteness and comprehensive knowledge of the commentator. We should be slow to accuse any illustrious poet of plagiarism. If he borrow thoughts, he knows how to ennoble them, and the rough ore, as it passes

knowledge of it was then imperfect, but his manner lively and elegant. Johnson said, 'It appears to me that Huggins has ball without powder, and Warton powder without ball.'" The Rev. Charles Rogers, LL.D., Historiographer of the Royal Historical Society, in his 'Annotations on the Common-place Book of James Boswell,' transcribes a corresponding passage from the Journal, in complete ignorance of the remarks contained in the 'Life,' and apparently unaware that such a man as Thomas Warton ever existed, for he spells the name Wharton—which it is just possible may have been an act of carelessness on Boswell's part—and is then good enough to inform us, in a note, that Thomas, Marquess of Wharton, a vigorous supporter of William of Orange, and familiarly known as Tom Wharton, composed the celebrated 'Lillibullero,' held high offices of state under Queen Anne and George I., and died in 1713!—an amusing complication of blunders which would not be forgiven in a sixth-form boy!



through his hands, is changed into a piece of exquisite workmanship. In the 'Life of Johnson,' several letters will be found addressed by him to the Wartons. For both the brothers he appears to have entertained a sincere affection. Johnson, however, sneered at Thomas Warton's poetry, and Warton had no great opinion of Johnson's taste or scholarship. Thus an estrangement was produced between them, which Johnson, it is said, lamented with tears in his eyes. At one time the intimacy was considerable, and Thomas Warton gives a pleasant account of a visit made by Johnson to Oxford the first time after quitting the University. Often they took long walks together into the country, returning to supper. "On one occasion," Thomas Warton writes, "as we returned to Oxford in the evening, I out-walked Johnson, and he cried '*Sufflamina!*' a Latin word, which came from his mouth with peculiar grace, and was as much as to say, *Put on your drag chain.*" The most interesting letters written by Johnson to the Wartons relate to the poet Collins—"poor dear Collins," he calls him, for he was then in a pitiable state of mental dejection. Collins won the love of the brothers and of the great critic who afterwards attempted to write his life, but none of them understood his rare genius as a

lyrical poet. "As men are often esteemed who cannot be loved," wrote his biographer, "so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure." It would seem, too, that Gray, notwithstanding his fine taste, did not appreciate Collins, for he classed Collins and Warton together as writers of Odes, and said, "It is odd enough, but each is the half of a considerable man, and one the counterpart of the other. They both deserve to last some years, but will not."

Gibbon called Oxford the head-quarters of "port and prejudice," and Thomas Warton, who made it his home, imbibed, it is to be feared, a considerable quantity of both. Free thought disturbed him, and the lax opinions uttered by Milton on ecclesiastical questions ruffled the serene calm of his orthodoxy. Possibly the extreme temperance of the Puritan poet was equally hateful to him. A poet who needed neither wine nor ale to stimulate his inspiration was scarcely after Warton's heart. There is indeed no proof that he ever drank to excess, but he was a lover of conviviality, and there are intimations which show pretty clearly that his habits were to say the least unclerical and undignified. He was a modest man, or, as a friend once described him, "the most under-bearing man existing," and



was averse to the society of strangers, "particularly those of a literary turn." It is stated also that he was fond of drinking his ale and smoking his pipe with persons of mean rank and education. And here it may not be amiss to mention another curious trait in his character. George Selwyn, as Rogers tells us, never missed "being in at a death at Tyburn," so delighted was he in seeing executions. Thomas Warton had the same taste, and it is stated that on one occasion when he did not wish to be discovered, he went to an execution disguised as a carter. He was also fond of military spectacles, and, in common with his brother, enjoyed the society of soldiers.

Warton held the Poetry Professorship for the usual term of ten years, and is said to have delivered lectures remarkable for eloquence of diction and justness of observation. Later on in life he was elected Camden Professor of History, but, after giving an inaugural address, appears to have thought he had sufficiently fulfilled the duties of the office. The truth seems to be that Warton, although capable of working hard at times, liked to work in his own way. He had long fits of comparative idleness, and, like Coleridge, his promises far exceeded his performance. Lord Eldon, remembering him as a college lecturer, exclaimed:

"Poor Tom Warton! at the beginning of every term he used to send to his pupils to know if they would wish to attend lectures." He projected a translation of 'Apollonius Rhodius,' a volume of criticism on Spenser's minor poems, and other books of comment or translation. Such projects, if accomplished, would probably have had little interest for the modern reader; but everyone must lament that Warton's great work, the only work of his which still retains a place in literature, the 'History of English Poetry,' was never brought to a conclusion.

Pope and Gray, it will be remembered, thought of writing such a history, and both these poets made plans of the projected work. There is a friendly letter from Gray on the subject, in which he relates his scheme and puts it at Warton's disposal. The method suggested, which was based on that of Pope, is to range the poets under different schools; but Warton found this plan impracticable, and elected to pursue his work chronologically. The student of poetry will find in it much to interest him and much also to cause disappointment. Southey praises the 'History' highly, but not perhaps extravagantly, when he writes: "Two works which appeared in the interval between Churchill and Cowper promoted beyond any others this growth of a better taste than



had prevailed for the hundred years preceding. These were Warton's 'History of English Poetry' and Percy's 'Reliques,' the publication of which must form an epoch in the continuation of that history." On the other hand, the book is marked by no artistic quality. It is full of errors; the narrative, in the judgment of one of Warton's editors, is eminently slipshod; materials are to be found in abundance, but there is no arrangement, no proportion: and the author, notwithstanding great labour and extensive research, has failed to produce a work which we read with willingness and pleasure.

The reader who takes up the latest and most elaborate edition of Warton's 'History,' namely, that produced by Mr. Hazlitt, will be amused or irritated to observe how often the text is contradicted by the notes *variorum*. Warton opens his first volume with a dissertation "On the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe;" and before commencing it the reader will learn from Mr. Wright that Warton's theories are "founded on a confusion of ideas, as well as on the absence of a large knowledge of the subject." Ritson, whose abstinence from animal food cannot be said to have improved his temper, attacked Warton at all times with his accustomed sharpness and irascibility, and commences his com-

ments on the essay by contradicting Warton's first sentence. Another critic, less likely to be influenced by prejudice, observes that the whole of the dissertation is extremely illogical, that the author's leading position respecting the influence of Arabic literature in Europe is unsound, and that most of the proofs which he alleges are matters which require proving themselves. All this may be perused before the reader has finished a single page of the text; and indeed he may be inclined to ask whether, supposing these judgments be correct, it is worth his while to read the essay at all. Let him take courage. In spite of errors, some of which may be imputed to the state of learning in Warton's day, and some to his consummate laziness—for it will be found that he often failed even to verify his quotations—the remarks on Romantic Fiction contain a good deal of information that is interesting and suggestive. Higher praise, perhaps, may be given to the third essay, "On the Introduction of Learning into England," which abounds in instructive statements. If many of these statements are familiar to the well-educated reader, he will remember that they were not generally familiar to Warton's contemporaries; and this remark should be borne in mind throughout the perusal of the 'History.' Un-

fortunately, it is but the fragment of what should have been a really great work, and the portion of it that might be expected to have proved most interesting never saw the light. In one respect, as Mr. Stopford Brooke has pointed out, the book expressed a feeling which was unknown to the school of Pope. With that school the present was so powerful that it filled all the view. "Thomas Warton's 'History of English Poetry' was but the beginning of that vivid delight in what our forefathers did, to which Chatterton afterwards gave a fresher life, and which runs through all the minor poets of the time."

The wearisome and by no means wholly satisfactory labour bestowed by Thomas Warton on Spenser and Milton has been expended on his own poems by Bishop Mant.* In his edition of the

* It is but fair to Warton's memory to give the estimate formed of his critical labours by Professor Masson. Writing of Milton's minor poems, he terms Warton the "commentator-in-chief," and adds:

"This well-known scholar, critic, and poet, remembered now chiefly by his 'History of English Poetry,' made a special study of Milton's Minor Poems, and published an edition of them in 1785, 'with Notes, critical and explanatory, and other Illustrations,' which may be said for the first time to have given them their true place among Milton's writings, and shown their abundant and minute interest in connection with his Biography. It is, indeed, with all deduction on account of the want of sympathy with some parts of Milton's mind and life natural in a critic in Warton's circumstances, one of the best books of comment in the English language. . . . .

poetical works almost every couplet is annotated; and so copious are the notes and illustrations that very frequently thirty or forty lines of closely-printed letter-press follow three or four lines of text. Such ponderous toil is thrown away upon a small poet like Warton. Who cares to know whether or not some poetical fancy expressed by him has been previously expressed by an earlier and greater writer? A poet like Milton, if he use the thoughts of other men, transforms them and ennobles them, so that they become as it were a part of himself. Warton's verses recall in every page passages from the Greek and Roman classics, and from our own poets; but Warton is an imitator, and cannot make them his own by the transmuting power of genius. His taste is, for the most part, correct, his feeling sincere, his knowledge extensive, his skill in the manipulation of verses considerable. Add to these merits a genuine love of natural objects, which is all the more worthy of note since the poets of highest repute in his day rarely looked out of doors, and we have given Warton all the praise to which he is entitled as a poet.

Warton's Notes to these Poems in fact have been the stock from which all subsequent editors, and also all biographers of Milton, from Todd, to the present day, have derived a good deal of their material."



His descriptive passages — witness the 'Lines written in Whichwood Forest,' and the 'Ode on the Approach of Summer'—are good, and would deserve higher praise were it not that they resemble so closely the early poems of Milton. When he attempts a subject demanding pathos or passion he does not rise above the mediocrity of the verse-maker — witness his ode entitled the 'Suicide,' which, however, we are bound to say has received the highest praise from his biographer. In this piece, which Dr. Mant calls the most popular of Warton's poems (alas! for popularity, we wonder how many of our readers have ever heard of it), we are told that an appeal is made to the heart as well as to the fancy, and that "the most striking poetical imagery is not only clothed with the most expressive diction, but heightened by the tenderest sentiments." After a careful and repeated perusal of the poem we confess that the "striking poetical imagery" does not strike us, and that the "expressive diction" appears to us laboured and conventional. One of the best specimens of Warton's work as a lyric poet is an ode called the 'Grave of King Arthur.' It is written in the octo-syllabic metre which Scott made so famous thirty years later, and there are passages in the poem which may even remind us of the "Ariosto of the North." Take, for instance, the

following lines. Henry II. on his road through Wales to suppress a rebellion in Ireland is entertained with the songs of the Welsh bards.

"Illumining the vaulted roof
A thousand torches flamed aloof;
From massy cups, with golden gleam
Sparkled the red metheglin's stream;
To grace the gorgeous festival
Along the lofty-windowed hall
The storied tapestry was hung;
With minstrelsy the rafters rung
Of harps that with reflected light
From the proud gallery glittered bright;
While gifted bards, a rival throng,
From distant Mona, nurse of song,
From Teivi fringed with umbrage brown,
From Elvy's vale and Cader's crown,
From many a shaggy precipice
That shades Ierne's hoarse abyss,
And many a sunless solitude
Of Radnor's inmost mountains rude;
To crown the banquet's solemn close
Themes of British glory chose."

Between the minds of Warton and Scott it may be possible to trace a likeness. In one department, says his biographer, Warton is not only unequalled, but original and unprecedented—namely, "in applying to modern poetry the embellishment of Gothic manners and Gothic art; the tournaments, and festivals, the poetry, music, painting, and architecture of elder days." In this respect, therefore, he



to some extent anticipated Scott; but Scott took possession of a region of which Warton knew comparatively little, and upon which, indeed, he did scarcely more than set his foot.

It is not much praise to say of Thomas Warton that in his Laureate odes he succeeded better than many of his predecessors, or than his immediate successor, than Tate or Cibber, than Whitehead or Pye; but it is a dreary task to read them, and it is amusing to contrast his earnest asseverations that the flattery of Kings is distasteful to him, with the glowing panegyrics which he heaps upon his "sacred sovereign," George III. Nothing could well be more false than the following lines, since this highly respectable monarch, as all the world knows, cared as little for the arts, and did as little to promote them, as William III.:

> "'Tis his to bid neglected genius glow,
> And teach the royal bounty how to flow.
> His tutelary's sceptre's sway
> The vindicated arts obey,
> And hail their patron king."

With equal absurdity he declares, as if with a noble love of independence, that he spurns Dryden's "panegyric strings," and then adds, that if Dryden had lived in his day—that is to say, under the

blessed sway of George III.—flattery would have been impossible:

> "The tuneful Dryden had not flattered here;
> His lyre had blameless been, his tribute all sincere."

When Warton died, Lady Hesketh wished to get the Laureateship for Cowper, but the Olney poet declined the offer. "Heaven guard my brains," he wrote, "from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them. It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading." Cowper's words, true enough in his day, will not apply now. The Laureate crown is no longer an extinguisher to genius, and the names of Southey, Wordsworth, and Tennyson have given fresh distinction to an office that was falling into contempt. Thomas Warton is considered by Hallam a very competent judge of Latin poetry. His Latin poems are writfen with elegance, and the like praise may be fairly given to his English poems; but elegance is the result of culture and scholarship rather than of genius. During the time that Warton was winning reputation as a man of letters and as a poet, there lived a peasant in Scotland, unknown or uncared for apparently by the

Oxford Professor, who gave higher proofs of poetical genius in a single song than Warton in all the verse he ever produced. The fruit of high culture may be found in the poetry of Thomas Warton; the fruit, how far more delightful and refreshing we need not say, of genuine poetical inspiration is given to us in the poetry of Burns.

The Sonnet was not in favour among the poetical critics of the eighteenth century. Dr. Johnson was incapable of seeing any beauty in the noble sonnets of Milton; George Steevens, who took high rank in the last century among the commentators of Shakspeare, declared that nobody would ever read Shakspeare's sonnets unless forced to do so by Act of Parliament. Bishop Mant was the contemporary of Johnson and Steevens, and it is not therefore surprising that he should show a like contempt for this species of poetry, which, he observes, is foreign to the genius of the English language. Of Warton's sonnets, he remarks that they are as good as sonnets generally are, by which he implies of course that they are not good for much. The truth is, however, that if Warton's memory as a poet be preserved at all, it will be due to two or three of the sonnets his biographer and critic despises. One of them written on a blank leaf of Dugdale's 'Monasticon,' has been termed by Charles Lamb of first-rate excel-

ence, and of others Coleridge has spoken in warm commendation.

Warton lived at Oxford the idle-busy life of a literary *dilettante*, and the chief variations from the smooth tenor of his University career appear to have been little country excursions, and visits to his brother at Winchester. To judge from the following anecdote he was ever a boy at heart, and had none of the "buckram" which he detected and disliked so much in the poet Mason:*

"During his residence at Winchester he was fond of associating with his brother's scholars; indeed, he entered so heartily into their sports and employments as to have been occasionally involved in rather ludicrous incidents. Being engaged with them in some culinary occupation, and alarmed by the sudden approach of Dr. Warton, he has been known to conceal himself in some dark corner, and has been drawn out of his hiding-place to the no small astonishment and amusement of the Doctor, who had taken him for some great boy. He would assist the boys in making their exercises, generally contriving to accommodate his composition to the capacity of him whom he was assisting. 'How many faults?' was a question the answer to which regu-

* It will be observed that this opinion of Mason differs from that held by Joseph Warton. See p. 203.



lated him; and a boy was perhaps as likely to be flogged for the verses of Mr. Warton as for his own." Then we are told that on one occasion Dr. Warton, suspecting his brother's hand in some exercise, asked him if he did not consider it worth half-a-crown. Thomas Warton assented. "'Well, then, you shall give the boy one.' Our author accordingly paid the half-crown for his own verses, and the Doctor enjoyed the joke."

There is little more to be said about Thomas Warton, beyond the pleasing fact, recorded by an acquaintance of more than forty years, that he had never, during the whole of that time, seen him out of humour; that he spent a great part of his income in charitable acts; that he loved children, and was humane to the brute creation; and that his conduct was uniformly marked by gentleness and humility. He grew fat as he advanced in years, thanks, perhaps, to his beloved Oxford ale, and Johnson declared that his manner of speaking resembled the gobble of a turkey-cock; but Johnson, be it remembered, said ill-natured things sometimes, even of his friends, and it is possible this remark was made when his friendship for Warton had reached the freezing point. In the University, notwithstanding the want of some qualities which

belong, or are supposed to belong, to the character of an Oxford Professor, he appears to have gained the esteem of his colleagues; and when he died, in 1790, his funeral was attended, not only by the members of his own college, but by the Vice-Chancellor, Heads of Houses, and Proctors at their particular request.

The learned brothers, as we have intimated before, cannot be properly estimated without a knowledge of the literary atmosphere that surrounded them. There can be no doubt they helped forward the work so nobly accomplished by the great poets who flourished at the beginning of this century. Joseph Warton, while doing justice to the brilliant genius of Pope, proved clearly, what no critic of our day would dream of questioning, that Pope's place is not in the front rank of our poets. Thomas Warton, by his comments on Spenser and Milton, did his uttermost to lead back the eighteenth-century reader to those great masters of poetry, and, by the publication of his 'History,' showed the student how much there is worthy of patient study to be found in early English literature. These were no light labours, and were of inestimable service at a time when, with a few illustrious exceptions, our poets or versemen were content to utter jingling platitudes in carefully measured lines.

JOHN WESLEY UNDER TWO ASPECTS.

SOUTHEY'S 'Life of Wesley' is one of the most interesting biographies in the language. It is the work of a thoroughly honest man, of a great master of English, and of a writer who, as far as conscientious diligence could make him, was well acquainted with his subject. There was much, however, in the extraordinary movement which owed its origin to Wesley with which Southey was scarcely competent to deal, and we meet sometimes with observations curiously inconsistent with the author's character as an orthodox Christian and sound Churchman. But the 'Life' loses nothing of its charm from faults like these; and Coleridge, who in his Notes on the work pointed out Southey's errors of judgment, has declared that the volumes were oftener in his hands than any other in his "ragged book-regiment." "How many and many an hour of self-oblivion," he adds, "do I owe to this 'Life of Wesley'; and how often have I argued with it, questioned, remon-

strated, been peevish, and asked pardon—then again listened, and cried, 'Right!' 'Excellent!'—and in yet heavier hours entreated it, as it were, to continue talking to me—for that I heard and listened, and was soothed, though I could make no reply."

Wesley's remarkable career, and the marvellous work which he achieved, have afforded a fruitful field of discussion from his own day to the present. He was a dogmatist, a controversialist, a theologian who loved his least important opinion better than his best friend; a man of undaunted courage, of acute though not of profound intellect; an enthusiast, as every man must be who achieves great results in the face of great opposition; and he possessed the power, common to all born rulers, of attracting everyone who came within his influence. As an orator he was surpassed by Whitefield, but in intellectual strength, in breadth of culture, in administrative skill, Wesley was beyond comparison superior to his friend. In any department of life demanding vast energy and organizing power Wesley would have achieved success, and though his chief gifts lay in action, there are indications that he might, had he pleased, have attained considerable reputation as a man of letters. Methodism, it may be observed, has produced no

literature of abiding value. A few of Charles Wesley's hymns take rank, indeed, with the best in the language, and are likely to form a permanent portion of our hymnody, but beyond these we know of nothing amidst the vast number of publications circulated by this body which has an interest for readers who do not belong to it. Books of a devotional character have been issued from the Methodist press by hundreds and by thousands, and are probably read by Wesleyans; but even of such books there is not one which, like the 'Holy Living' of Taylor, the 'Saint's Rest' of Baxter, or the splendid allegory of Bunyan, has obtained universal recognition.

Wesley himself was a prolific writer. He appears always to have had some work on hand, and what he began he was certain to complete. Although during a great part of his life he travelled from four to five thousand miles yearly on horseback or in a carriage, and generally preached twice every day, his pen was far from idle. He made use of the minutes most of us are apt to lose, and his works, it is needless to say, fill many volumes. Six of these (in the edition of 1813) are occupied by the 'Journal,' which forms a curious medley of spiritual experiences, marvellous and amusing incidents, and personal statements, which, when put together,



supply a life-like picture of the writer. How, amidst his innumerable occupations, he could find time to write such a record of his public and private career, it is difficult to say; but Wesley's whole course was one of conflict, and of triumph over circumstances, and he exemplified the noble saying of Shakespeare that "in the reproof of chance lies the true proof of men."

The 'Journal," although the most readable of Wesley's writings, is, we suspect, not often read in the present day. It exhibits Wesley under a variety of aspects. His constant eagerness to gain knowledge, a feature of character in which he resembled Dr. Johnson, his sagacity in ordinary affairs, his amazing and growing credulity with regard to spiritual phenomena, his keen observation, his cheerful disposition and physical activity, which prevented him from brooding over griefs that would have given sleepless nights to more sensitive men, his curious lack of reticence, his unfailing confidence in his own judgment—all these traits stand out prominently in the 'Journal,' and will partly amuse and partly irritate the reader. Moreover, this curious book affords much information with regard to the manners of the age, and it is no small boon to obtain this information from a writer who is always



accurate in his statements, save when, as in his account of the Moravians, his violent prejudices get the better of his honesty.

Unlike some religious enthusiasts, who treat all human learning as dross, Wesley valued highly the advantages he had gained from a University training. At college he became eminent in logic, and no man, according to his biographer, was ever more dexterous in the art of reasoning; he gave great attention to mathematics, studied Hebrew and Arabic, and laid out a plan of study which, if it were not strictly followed, showed at least the extent of his ambition. For a time, indeed, in the first warmth of religious zeal, his fanaticism overpowered his judgment, and during his voyage to Virginia, in which, by the way, he learnt German, he wrote to his brother Samuel begging him to banish all such poison from his school as the classics which were usually read there; but this feeling was not lasting, and notwithstanding the incessant whirl of his after-life, he never wholly neglected the great writers of Greece and Rome. In his old age he writes: "I saw the Westminster scholars act the 'Adelphi' of Terence, an entertainment not unworthy of a Christian. O how do these heathens shame us! Their very comedies contain both excellent sense

the liveliest pictures of men and manners, and so fine strokes of genuine morality as are seldom found in the writings of Christians." He relates, among similar exploits, how, in riding to Newcastle, he finished the Tenth 'Iliad' of Homer, and was struck not only by the writer's "amazing genius," but by the "vein of piety" that runs through his whole work. Another day he read over, whilst riding, a great part of the 'Odyssey,' and expresses for it the highest admiration. To read Greek on horseback must have taxed even Wesley's eyes, but so accustomed was he to reading in that position, that he tells us he generally kept history, poetry, and philosophy for such occasions, "having other employment at other times." "Near thirty years ago, I was thinking," he writes, "how is it that no horse ever stumbles while I am reading? No account can possibly be given but this: Because then I throw the reins on his neck. I then set myself to observe, and I aver that in riding about a hundred thousand miles I scarce ever remember any horse (except two, that would fall head over heels any way) to fall or make a considerable stumble, which I rode with a slack rein. To fancy, therefore, that a tight rein prevents stumbling is a capital blunder. I have repeated the trial more

frequently than most men in the kingdom can do. A slack rein will prevent stumbling if anything will. But in some horses nothing can."

Wesley was an omnivorous reader. Nothing came amiss to him. He reads Hay 'On Deformity,' and remarks that it is, perhaps, one of the prettiest trifles extant in the English tongue; he reads in his "scraps of time" Commodore Byron's narrative, and deems "that no novel in the world can be more affecting or more surprising than this history;" he takes up "casually" Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey,' and finds fault with the title, as well as the book itself. "*Sentimental*, what is that? It is not English! He might as well say *Continental*. It is not sense. It conveys no determinate idea, yet one fool makes many. And this nonsensical word (who would believe it?) is become a fashionable one! However, the book agrees full well with the title, for one is as queer as the other. For oddity, uncouthness, and unlikeness to all the world beside, I suppose the writer is without a rival." Among other strange books, he records his perusal of Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees,' and of the 'Life of Baron Trenck,' which he styles a most dangerous book, adding, "I wish none that cares for his soul would read a page of it." Are any of our readers

acquainted with the Rev. P. Skelton's works? If so, they will hardly accept Wesley's judgment, that "he shows all the wit of Dr. Swift, joined with ten times his judgment." Indeed, Wesley has not a word to say in favour of Swift; and in another entry in the 'Journal' he observes, "In my way, I looked over a volume of Dr. Swift's 'Letters.' I was amazed. Was ever such trash palmed upon the world under the name of a great man? More than half of what is contained in these sixteen volumes would be dear at twopence a volume, being all, and more than all, the dull things which that witty man ever said." There is more truth, perhaps, in his estimate of Lord Chesterfield, whom he describes, after reading his 'Letters,' as "a man of much wit, middling sense, and some learning, but as absolutely void of virtue as any Jew, Turk, or heathen that ever lived." He is often severe in his comments. Smollet had misrepresented the Methodists, and his critic asks whether a man of reason will give credit to any fact upon his authority. After reading Warner's 'History of Ireland' with "calm deliberation," he writes: "I do not believe one leaf of it is true from the beginning to the end." He contrasts Pennant's 'Tour in Scotland' with Dr. Johnson's, and wonders that Pennant, a man of sense and

learning, should write bad English in almost every page; he complains of Robertson's "intolerable prolixity," and regards Swedenborg as an entertaining madman. Rousseau is styled a "consummate coxcomb," and Voltaire's 'Henriade' convinces him that "French is the poorest, meanest language in Europe," and that it is "as impossible to write a fine poem in French, as to make fine music upon a jew's-harp."

Wesley seems to have read a great deal of poetry, and his critical judgments will frequently sound strange in modern ears. We do not remember any allusion to Shakespeare, but he considered 'Douglas,' "the play which has made so much noise," one of the finest tragedies he ever read. Blackmore's 'Prince Arthur' he termed "by no means equal to his poem on the Creation, in which are many admirably fine strokes." (Alas for fame! what do modern readers know of these fine strokes?) The comment on Beattie is amusing: "Certainly one of the best poets of the age. He wants only the ease and simplicity of Mr. Pope; I know one, and only one, that has it." This, no doubt, was his brother Charles, for whose poetical abilities John had the highest value. In reading that "pretty trifle," the 'Life of Mrs. Bellamy,' whom he terms a lively and elegant

writer, he finds an anecdote about Garrick, who, it is said, flung overboard a parcel given him before making a voyage, on finding that it contained 'Wesley's Hymns.' "I cannot believe it," writes the elder brother; "I think Mr. G. had more sense. He knew my brother well, and he knew him to be not only far superior in learning, but in poetry, to Mr. Thomson and all his theatrical writers put together. None of them can equal him either in strong, nervous sense, or purity and elegance of language." Wesley had a mean opinion of Thomson, but on reading his tragedy of 'Edward and Eleanora' he was agreeably surprised. "The plot," he writes, "is conducted with the utmost art, and wrought off in the most surprising manner. It is quite his masterpiece, and I really think might vie with any modern performance of the kind." But of all the imaginative writers of that century, he praised Prior the most highly, considered his 'Solomon' one of the sublimest poems in the language, and seemed oblivious to Prior's naughtiness as an amatory poet.

Like Dr. Watts, Wesley was willing to work for children, for whom he entertained a liking that affected his theology. "Who can believe," he writes, "that these pretty little creatures have the wrath



of God abiding on them?" He wrote for his school at Kingswood a short French Grammar, revised Kennet's 'Antiquities,' and Potter's 'Grecian Antiquities'—"a dry, dull, heavy book"—prepared a History of England, and a short Roman History, and several other school-books. On the whole, considering the kind of life he led, the amount of literary work accomplished by Wesley is marvellous. But he was blessed in no common measure with a vigorous mind and a strong body. The man who, at eighty-two, could write that many years had passed since he had felt any such thing as weariness, might well be capable of achievements which astonish persons endowed with ordinary constitutions.

The respect we feel for Wesley's intellectual activity, is exchanged for a feeling of surprise and almost of contempt, when we examine another aspect of his character. His credulity was unbounded. No Romish devotee ever accepted a story of spiritual marvels upon more slender grounds, no saint of the middle ages could be more ready to transform every perplexing incident of life into a miraculous occurrence. Like all faithful Christian men, he lived in the immediate presence of the Deity, but Wesley was not satisfied with the belief



that a Being, all wise, all powerful, all good, was directing the government of the world, or even that He was guiding providentially the steps of those who called upon Him; he believed also, that he was himself under some peculiar and extraordinary care. We knew a zealous clergyman who regarded it as a merciful arrangement, if a train were late whenever he was too lazy or too busy to reach the station at the appointed time, and a belief similar in character can alone account for some of the entries in Wesley's extraordinary 'Journal.' The like consciousness of being a special favourite of the Almighty, will account for his readiness to attribute the phenomena that occurred in connection with his preaching to supernatural agency. These manifestations happened in the early and fruitful days of Methodism, and were regarded by Wesley as great spiritual facts. While he was preaching, his hearers appeared to be moved by an unseen power. They raved, they shouted, they foamed at the mouth, they fell upon the ground, they seemed to be contending with invisible foes, they even uttered foul blasphemies, until at length the evil demon was exorcised, and they arose in a sound mind. No doubt there was much in this disturbance which was not due to imposture. Great excitement in a great

crowd has again and again produced results which would be unaccountable under ordinary circumstances, and it is quite possible that the call to repentance, heard for the first time by rude, rough men and women, may have powerfully affected the physical frame. These manifestations happened frequently within doors, and Wesley alludes more than once to the extreme heat of the rooms in which he preached, but it is evident that he paid no attention to commonplace circumstances like these, and regarded the effects caused by his preaching as indubitable evidences of its power.

Several remarkable instances of this are to be met with in Wesley's 'Journal,' as well as of superstition as extravagant as that which originated the touching for the King's Evil. Thus he records how a dog began howling under his window in a most uncommon manner about two o'clock in the morning, and how just then a certain William B——r died; how a decent woman who had suffered a violent pain in the head for some weeks begged him to put his hand on her cheek, and was cured from that moment; how a young woman whose breasts were "quite hard, and black as soot," upon being prayed for, became perfectly well in a moment; how, in answer to prayer, the rain ceased

and the wind blew when required, and his lame horse became sound. The last-mentioned incident is thus recorded:

"When Mr. Shepherd and I left Smeaton, my horse was so exceeding lame that I was afraid I must have lain by too. We could not discern what it was that was amiss, and yet he could scarce set his foot to the ground. By riding thus seven miles I was thoroughly tired, and my head ached more than it had done for some months. (What I here aver is the naked fact, let every man account for it as he sees good.) I then thought, 'Cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means or without any?' Immediately my weariness and headache ceased, and my horse's lameness in the same instant. Nor did he halt any more either that day or the next."

Wesley visits a man in a violent fever, who revives directly he sees him, and begins to recover from that time; and he tells the story of an Irish woman he knew, a zealous Papist, who became blind for three months, until casting her eyes one day on a New Testament, she discovered that she could see clearly:

"I said to myself, 'I won't read this Protestant book, I will read my own book.' Accordingly I opened the Mass-Book, but could not see one word; it appeared all dark and black. I made the trial thrice over, holding the Mass-Book in one hand and the Testament in the other. I could not see anything in the Mass-Book, but could read the Testament as well as ever. On this I threw away the Mass-Book, fully resolved to meddle with it no more."

This story, and others still more outrageous, Wesley notes down, without a doubt or question as to the truthfulness and accuracy of the narrator.

The faith of Wesley's acquaintances led sometimes to rather inconvenient results. "I talked," he writes, "with one who, by the advice of his pastor, had very calmly and deliberately beat his wife with a large stick, till she was black and blue almost from head to foot; and he insisted it was his duty so to do, because she was surly and ill-natured, and that he was full of faith all the time he was doing it, and had been so ever since." It should be observed that some of the most extravagant stories related by Wesley came to him by hearsay, the truth of others he endeavoured to investigate for his own satisfaction, but he was always readily satisfied when the statements were made by pious people, or by people who simulated piety. Frequently he gives long extracts from the letters or journals of eye-witnesses, who describe manifestations more remarkable than any witnessed by Wesley himself. One of these writers relates how, at the preaching of a Mr. B——, he saw a fresh, healthy countryman drop down with a violence inconceivable, and heard "the stamping of his feet ready to break the boards, as he lay in strong convulsions at the bottom of the pew."

Then a girl was seized, then a boy of about eight years old, who "roared above his fellows;" a little later, a stranger fell backward to the wall, then forward on his knees, "wringing his hands and roaring like a bull. His face at first turned quite red, and then almost black. He screamed out, 'Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do? O for one drop of the blood of Christ!' As he spoke, God set his soul at liberty, and the rapture he was in seemed too great for human nature to bear." The same writer relates that while another man was preaching, fifteen or sixteen persons dropped down, and some little children lay as dead, or struggled with all their might, and cried out so that the loudest singing could scarce be heard. So violent was the struggling, that several pews and benches were broken. Others dropped down on their way home, and were found lying as dead in the road.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and the student of psychology is probably acquainted with phenomena similar to those which we have mentioned. Wesley's mistake lay in regarding them invariably as signs of Divine interposition; he appears to have encouraged the excitement, instead of endeavouring to moderate it. There are proofs that much in these demonstrations was

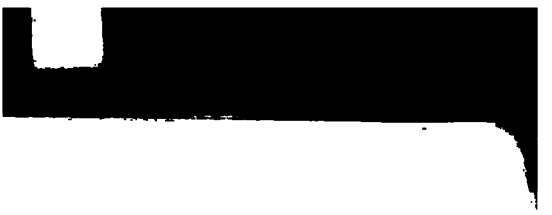
spurious, and might have been suppressed by Wesley, and no one in our day will doubt that his influence in that case would have been greater, and the opposition which he met with less violent. His brother Charles set Wesley an admirable example in this respect:

"To day [he says in his 'Journal'; the passage is aptly quoted by Southey] one came who was pleased to fall into a fit for my entertainment. He beat himself heartily; I thought it a pity to hinder him; so instead of singing over him, as had often been done, we left him to recover at his leisure. A girl, as she began to cry, I ordered to be carried out; her convulsions were so violent as to take away the use of her limbs, till they laid her without at the door, and left her; then she immediately found her legs, and walked off. Some very unstill sisters, who always took care to stand near me, and tried who could cry loudest, since I have had them removed out of my sight have been as quiet as lambs. The first night I preached here, half my words were lost through the noise of their outcries; last night, before I began, I gave public notice that whosoever cried so as to drown my voice should, without any man's hurting them, or judging them, be gently carried to the farthest corner of the room: but my porters had no employment the whole night."

The sound sense of Charles failed to influence his brother, whose credulity was insatiable. When one of his preachers declared that he had gone through the whole service of the meeting in his sleep, he accepts the statement, and undertakes to reason about it. When a sick man accuses Wesley falsely,

he writes: "If he acknowledges his fault, I believe he will recover; if not, his sickness is unto death." When a woman who had totally lost the sight of one eye relates that the Saviour appeared to her in a dream, put his hand upon her eye and immediately cured it, he credits the narrative, because of her "unblamable character." When he visits the hospital, and finds a patient there who has had several pins extracted from her body, which the physicians believed she had swallowed, he asks: "Which is the greater credulity, to believe this is purely natural, or to ascribe it to preternatural agency?" When his horses fall lame or are otherwise disabled on a journey, he attributes the misfortune to Satan, "the old murderer"; and when a young woman tells him that she is in constant communication with a female angel, who informs her of many things before they come to pass, he writes: "When we were alone, there was a wonderful power in her words. I was soon convinced that she was not only sincere, but deep in grace, and therefore incapable of deceit."

In the year 1780 a man named Welsh wrote to Wesley asking him "to take a view of those wonderful marks of the Lord's hatred to duelling, called The Brothers' Steps, which," he added, "are in



the fields about a third of a mile northward from Montague House." According to the tradition two brothers fought about some woman, and both were mortally wounded.

"The prints of their feet," writes Welsh, "are about the depth of three inches, and nothing will vegetate so much as to disfigure them. The number is only eighty-three; but probably some are at present filled up, for I think there were formerly more in the centre, where each unhappy combatant wounded the other to death; and a bank, on which the first who fell died, retains the form of his agonizing couch by the curse of barrenness, while grass flourishes all about it. Mr. George Hall, who was the librarian of Lincoln's Inn, first showed me those steps, twenty-eight years ago, when, I think, they were not quite so deep as now. He remembered them about thirty years, and the man who first showed them him about thirty more, which goes back to the year 1692; but I suppose they originated in King Charles II.'s reign. My brother well remembered their being ploughed up and corn sown to deface them, about fifty years ago. But all was labour in vain, for the prints returned in a while to their pristine form; as probably will those that are now filled up."

Upon receiving this strange story, and learning from other sources that the marks existed, Wesley went to look for them. After a considerable search he discovered the footprints "about five hundred yards east of Tottenham Court Road. The steps," he states, "are of the size of a large human foot, about three inches deep, and lie nearly from north-east to south-west; we counted only seventy-six, but



we were not exact in counting. The place where one or both the brothers are supposed to have fallen is still bare of grass." Having seen these marks in the field, Wesley leaps at once to the conclusion that the tradition as to their origin was correct, and asks whether this is not an astonishing instance held forth to all the inhabitants of London of the justice and power of God.

Truly does Southey say that there was nothing more remarkable about this remarkable man than his readiness to believe any strange tale that might be told him: "He accredited and repeated stories of apparitions, and witchcraft, and possession, so silly as well as monstrous, that they might have nauseated the coarsest appetite for wonder; this, too, when the belief on his part was purely gratuitous, and no motive can be assigned for it except the pleasure of believing."

Wesley was a great dabbler in medicine, and wrote as well as read largely on the subject. For a long time he tried a vegetable diet, but was forced to return to animal food. He had much faith in electricity, and considered that he cured a man by this means who was suffering from *angina pectoris*. He regarded wine as "one of the noblest cordials in nature," but condemned the use of tea strongly, and



advised his people not to drink it. In a letter addressed to a friend he enlarges with great unction upon the evils of tea drinking. He argues that people who are uninjured by the use of tea should give up drinking it for the sake of those who are; that our ancestors lived very well without it, and therefore we can do without it also; that it is unwholesome and expensive, and "has too much hold on the hearts of them that use it;" that it is a duty to abstain for the sake of some poor man or of some miserable woman who drinks it and "says she does no evil," who "will not believe the poison will hurt her, because it does not sensibly at least hurt you." "Oh, throw it away," he adds, with evangelical earnestness; "let her have one plea less for destroying her body, if not her soul, before the time." Wesley's arguments, such as they are, are quickly changed into exhortations, and he writes of adding fault to fault, of joining in wasteful self-indulgence, and of grieving the Spirit of God, as if the use of the cup that "cheers but not inebriates," were a sin against heaven and against nature.

Like other good men, John Wesley invents a sin, as if there were not sins enough in the world of the devil's making, and then denounces all those who venture to commit it. One narrow-minded man

discovers that it is a sin to dance; another objects to music; a third, like Mr. Müller, finds the beauties of nature injurious to his spiritual life; a fourth is of opinion that the plays of Shakespeare and the novels of Scott are unwholesome food for Christians; a fifth, that a country walk on Sunday is an infraction of the fourth commandment; a sixth denounces tobacco as "a gorging fiend:" and thus our narrow and rugged path through this troublesome world is made narrower and more rugged, and the dread of imaginary sins presses like a frightful nightmare on the hearts of the timid and feeble-minded.

Wesley not only undertook to dispense medicines, but wrote a small volume entitled 'Primitive Physic,' which contains some amusing advice and several preposterous prescriptions. Students are recommended frequently to shave and to wash their feet; a person suffering from ague may apply a large slit onion to the stomach, or take at certain times "six middling pills of cobwebs," a remedy that "seldom fails." The asthmatic patient is advised "to live for a fortnight on boiled carrots only," a remedy as unpleasant as the disease. The cure for a cold in the head is to "pare very thin the yellow rind of an orange, roll it up inside out, and thrust a roll into each nostril." To prevent cramp, "tie your garter



smooth and tight under your knee at going to bed," or "lay a roll of brimstone under your pillow." To reduce corpulence Wesley recommends, in opposition to Banting, "a total vegetable diet;" to relieve a particular kind of colic he gives the curious advice of Sydenham, "hold a live puppy constantly on the belly." Raging madness may be cured by "setting the patient with his head under a great waterfall as long as his strength will bear," a rather difficult feat, we imagine, for the patient's keeper. Berkeley's famous recipe of tar-water is largely recommended by Wesley. This is one of the remedies for pleurisy, for which a decoction of nettles is also suggested, or "half a drachm of soot." The unfortunate man who is afflicted with scurvy must live on turnips for a month, or take tar-water for three months; but in this case, as in others, Wesley sometimes hits upon the antidote employed in modern times, for he recommends lemon juice and sugar as "a precious remedy and well tried." Tartar emetic he considers one of the best medicines known. "I have given it," he writes, "to many thousand patients with the utmost safety and with the greatest advantage;" but his chief remedy is electricity, which he regards as the specific for a vast number of disorders.

We laugh at some of Wesley's old-fashioned pre-

scriptions, and are amazed at the presumption of the man who without a medical education undertook to cure men's bodies as well as their souls; but it is fair to add that his little volume of 'Primitive Physic,' despite a thousand absurdities, contains some homely counsel as to the care of the health, and some "old wives'" prescriptions, formed of simple herbs, the virtue of which is still, we believe, accredited in many rural districts.

The mixture of practical sagacity and of credulity which marks Wesley's character as a religious reformer, is evident also in his self-imposed office of physician. After reading the 'Journal,' and the remarkable little volume called 'Primitive Physic,' we are reminded forcibly of Wesley's own words: "There is no folly too great even for a man of sense, if he resolve to follow his own imagination."



ROBERT SOUTHEY.

THE profession of literature has rarely had a more honourable representative than the Poet Laureate, Southey. As the Laureate, he wrote poems which are unworthy of him, as a politician he made many egregious blunders, and his partisanship exposed him whilst living to considerable obloquy. We know now, however, what his contemporaries could not know, that the faults of Southey are comparatively venial, and that his virtues deserve the highest admiration. The record of his life has been inconsiderately laid bare to the public; but, while it exposes much that was rash and presumptuous, and some weaknesses that ought never to have been known beyond the family circle, it shows too, beyond all controversy, the noble nature of the poet, his high courage, his unswerving rectitude, his almost unexampled benevolence, his strong affections, his generous and ungrudging appreciation of contemporary genius. No mean



lousy of the great writers who made the early rt of this century so famous disturbed the ace of Southey; and if some of the satisfaction he inced sprung from a profound consciousness of his n worth, it must be allowed that he was never ger to snatch the prizes to which he thought himlf entitled, and was always ready by word and act magnify the achievements of his friends.

The most ambitious and the most voluminous thor of his age, Southey was also one of the least pular; and time, instead of changing the national rdict, as he anticipated, has apparently confirmed

His vast epics, the acorns which he planted ien his poetical contemporaries, as he said, were wing kidney-beans, are not the trees whose mastic proportions win our admiration or to whose ade we willingly resort; his bulky histories Brazil and the Peninsular War stand upon our elves unread; his 'Doctor,' that strange jumble of mour and nonsense, of learning and simplicity, of erary strength and weakness, is read chiefly by e curious; his 'Naval History of England' is a ad book, so is the 'Colloquies'; the 'Book of the urch' is not dead, but it has never attained pularity; and probably the only works which ep Southey's name before the latest generation

of readers are the biographies of John Wesley and of Lord Nelson. Failure, then, if any trust may be placed in the verdict we have recorded, is written upon a large proportion of Southey's work. It is sad to state this, after reading the innumerable passages in his correspondence in which he foretells the plaudits of posterity; and it is all the sadder, when we remember that while living he knew but little of the commercial success which so many writers less competent and less worthy have achieved.

It is especially unfortunate for the memory of Southey that his career has been recorded by an incompetent biographer, and his correspondence published by an injudicious editor. The theme was a noble one, for few men have ever lived a more honourable and consistent life; no author ever did more to dignify his profession. The materials too were ample; for Southey, though never prone to talk (he said once that Coleridge's garrulity had taught him to be silent), poured out his feelings in letters to his friends. The task, it is said by Mr. Forster, would have been undertaken by Sir Henry Taylor, "whom Southey had singled out as the one man living of a younger generation whom he had taken into his heart of hearts;" but a dispute arose which imposed silence upon that distinguished poet, and

monument worthy of Southey remains still to be ected. The thought of what we might have had the author of 'Philip Van Artevelde' had been ntrusted with the work makes us all the more issatisfied with what we possess. With every wish, o doubt, to do justice to his father, it has been the n's misfortune to produce in six volumes an normous mass of ill-arranged matter, commencing ndeed with the poet's birth and terminating with is death, but having no other claim to be called a Life" of Southey. To this lumber there is no dex, so that the critical reader, as he wanders elplessly through the pages, is forced to remember e author of his misery at every turn. This is not l; Southey's son-in-law, the Rev. J. Wood Warter, as produced four volumes of correspondence, also ithout an index, which contain many letters that ght never to have seen the light, some parodies Scripture unworthy of Southey, and some edi- rial comments which can only be characterized exquisitely foolish. Mr. Warter is careful to let s readers know that he is a man of learning, well ad in German literature, and not unversed in anish and Swedish lore; but whatever his learning ay be, he lacks the common sense and the critical dgment required of an editor, and instead of

assisting the reader to form a just estimate of Southey, has been content to heap up additional lumber which he must turn over unaided.

All this is eminently unlucky for the poet's fame. The veneration of his relatives has prevented them from seeing the injury they have done him, partly by an inability to use wisely the manuscripts at their disposal, and mainly by preventing the work from being undertaken by more competent hands. The truth is, that no one can properly estimate Southey as an author without becoming acquainted with him as a man. For a long life he dedicated himself to literature with a devotion which no disappointment could check, and no difficulty daunt. With his vigorous intellect, his vast memory, his persistent resolution, and with a faith in his own powers strong enough to produce faith in others, there can be no doubt that in any of the beaten tracks upon which men pick up fame and wealth Southey might have won both. Tall in person, handsome in face, of quiet gentlemanly manners, with a head upon his shoulders which was the envy of Lord Byron, Southey in the start of life had many outward advantages in his favour which no one can afford to despise. Add to these gifts a healthy body, and a disposition free from the least tendency to dis-

sipation or extravagance, and it is easy to see that a man so gifted, and with a character so firmly knit, might have made a distinguished name in any calling.

The dream of Southey and Coleridge, known as Pantisocracy, has been told so often that it need not be mentioned here. In early life both the poets were full of visionary schemes, and both by their early marriages to the Misses Fricker may be said to have been wilfully improvident. Southey, it will be remembered, was indebted to the help of Joseph Cottle for the sum required to buy a wedding-ring, which the young wife, retaining her maiden name, hung round her neck, while her husband parted with her at the church door to spend six months with his uncle, Mr. Hill, chaplain to the factory at Lisbon. The young poet had just completed his twenty-first year when this important event took place. It must have seemed at the time, to any person of mature judgment, an act of supreme folly; but thanks to Southey's dauntless courage and high integrity of purpose, it turned out happily enough. No man ever had a more faithful helpmeet, no woman a more affectionate and considerate husband. The first days of their union were full of privations. Southey was not willing to gain his fortune in any

ordinary professional channel. He hated London and all large cities; he made a trial of the law, and pronounced the pursuit detestable; he commenced the study of medicine, and found "medical studies of all others most unfavourable to the moral sense;" he declined from conscientious scruples to take Holy Orders; but he made at length what he fondly terms "one happy choice," and betook himself to literature as his business in life. "No man," he said, "was ever more contented with his lot than I am," and in spite of constant difficulties he remained faithful to his choice. The struggle was a severe one; but Southey, while considering himself a heaven-born poet, trusted more to his industry than to his genius for the support of his family. His poems might, assuredly would, make him immortal, of this he never doubted for a moment; but present necessities demanded literary work of a less lofty kind, and if the poet indulged in splendid dreams, he never allowed them to interfere with the daily drudgery which was to produce the daily bread.

At the age of thirty we find him settled at Greta Hall, and there, for nearly forty years, he laboured at his calling with a hopefulness and assiduity that are well-nigh unparalleled. Sir Walter Scott was



probably as industrious as Southey, and both of these illustrious men were remarkable for the careful way in which they husbanded their leisure moments; but much of Scott's work, unlike Southey's, was not done at the desk, but while riding on horseback, or walking silently by the banks of his favourite river, or vigorously wielding his axe in the plantations at Abbotsford. Scott, at the busiest period of his life, moved constantly in society, flitted frequently from the country to Edinburgh, discharged his official duties, wrote his wonderful books, superintended his estates, and lived among his people so as to be almost regarded by the poorest of them as a blood-relation. In his prime he was, as he himself relates, a desperate climber, a bold rider, a deep drinker, and a stout player at single-stick. Every moment of his time was occupied, but there was considerable variety in the occupation. He was a clerk of session, a landed proprietor, a diner-out, an influential citizen with public duties to perform, as well as a poet, a novelist, and a man of letters.

Southey's life ran in a much narrower groove. He went but rarely into society; scarcely knew by sight any of the country people living near him; never rode on horseback; took no outdoor exercise

save that of walking, and this often from a mere sense of duty and with a book in his hand; and, although living in one of the loveliest spots in all England, and not insensible to its charms, preferred the shelves of his library to the finest prospect in the world. He found his relaxation where he found his daily labour, within the walls of his study. "I can't afford," he wrote, "to do one thing at a time; no, nor two neither; and it is only by doing many things that I contrive to do so much; for I cannot work long at anything without hurting myself, and I do everything by heats; then, by the time I am tired of one, my inclination for another is at hand."

Southey was, as we have said, an affectionate husband, and a fond father; and whenever in his correspondence he alludes to his home happiness, it is with a tenderness and warmth of feeling that are eminently beautiful. Moreover, he was a constant, and, at all times, noble friend, ready, even when in straits himself, to help with money or with his pen those who were more straitened. No one ever acted better the part of the Good Samaritan; and while he never forgot a benefit received, it would seem as if his own magnanimous charity had no place in his memory. The story of his life



abounds in instances of the most generous self-denial, and of a steadfast goodness of heart which never shrunk from the demands made upon it. Heavily burdened as he was with work, he was continually accepting fresh literary labour in order to benefit others; nor was this all, for he received under his own roof his wife's widowed sister, Mrs. Lovell; and when Coleridge, in that strange waywardness of mood which his vice of opium-eating can alone explain, deserted his wife and children, it was with Southey that they found a home. There is a beautiful anecdote given by Lockhart of a poor music-master offering Scott all his savings in the hour of his adversity; a similar story may be told of Southey, who, when his friend May, an early benefactor of the poet, fell into difficulties, sent him more than 600*l.*, which was all the money he possessed.

It has been said, let us hope without truth, that the cares and agitations of life in these days have greatly lessened its joyousness. Southey maintained his lightheartedness throughout the busy years of his literary activity. "Perhaps," writes Wordsworth to Haydon, "some of Southey's friends may think that his tranquillity is disturbed by the late and present attacks upon him;—not a

jot.* Bating inward sorrow for the loss of his only son, he is as cheerful as the lark and happy as the day. Prosperous in his literary undertakings, admired by his friends, in good health, and honoured by a large portion of the public, busily employed from morning to night, and capable, from his talent, of punishing those who act unjustly towards him, what cause has he to be disturbed?" †

If the poet had strong and generous affections, he was also a good hater, but this feeling was shown to principles rather than to persons; and although political animosity led him to write bitterly against his antagonists, there was not one of them for whom, after the moment of writing, he retained an unkindly feeling. It is said that he seldom spoke harshly of any man with whom he had once conversed; he had too large a heart for petty animosities, and he was wholly free from envy. At the time when the whole year's sale of a ponderous epic failed to produce the poet five pound, Scott

* Some of these attacks, as we learn from the same letter, were made by "the miscreant Hazlitt, the most perverse and malevolent creature that ill luck has ever thrown in my way."

† It is worth observing, that the warmest praise and the deepest affection Southey received, came from those who had the closest knowledge of his daily life. Sara Coleridge, for instance, a woman of the keenest observation, thought Southey, upon the whole, the best man she had ever known.

was gaining his thousands, but not a word of bitterness fell from Southey on this score; and the praise he bestowed on his contemporaries, a few of them more distinguished than himself, but the larger number men of far inferior power, is frequently more generous than just.

Although not, as we have said, a sociable man, he had the good fortune to know intimately most of the illustrious authors who made the early part of this century so famous; and long before Wordsworth had received the public recognition, which was his due as the greatest poet of the age, Southey, like Coleridge, expressed his admiration of his friend and neighbour in no niggard terms. This noble triumvirate, by the way, reminds us that probably not since Shakespeare's day have three men of equal mark lived together on terms of intimacy and affection. Landor called them "three towers of one castle," and, as all the world knows, they have been absurdly classed together as forming a school of poetry. In a measure, indeed, every poet influences his fellows, and no man, however original his genius, is strong enough or self-contained enough to take a completely independent path. Scott, it is evident, owed a debt to Coleridge; Coleridge, strange to say, derived some of his early inspiration from



Bowles; Byron, the poet of passion, owed much to the meditative Muse of Wordsworth, and Wordsworth himself, although but slightly affected by the works of his brother poets, sometimes caught their notes and was under the spell of their genius. Southey, who possessed a fatal facility of verse-making (he had written more than thirty thousand lines before he was nineteen), paid chief homage, as other poets have done, to the transcendent imagination of Spenser, whose 'Faery Queene' he read through thirty times; and of contemporary poets he showed most regard to Wordsworth and to Landor. He acknowledges, also, that he derived much benefit from Cowper and "more from Bowles," and he appears to have caught his unfortunate fancy for unrhymed stanzas from a Dr. Sayers, whose name is probably unknown to modern readers. But Southey belonged to no school, and whatever may be his ultimate position in English poetry, it is one which has at least the merit of being independent.

In later life Southey seems to have discovered that he was less likely to be remembered for his poetry than for his prose, but in early manhood it was as a poet that he anticipated earthly immortality, and a monument in St. Paul's. And it is curious to note how he followed his vocation as a



poet with the steady business-like regularity that marked his ordinary engagements with the booksellers. "I had rather leave off eating than poetizing," he said, and so he tagged verses and ate his daily meals with a similar regularity. With this difference, however, that he was a moderate eater and a most immoderate rhymster. "What a pity," he said, at two-and-twenty, "that I should not execute my intention of writing more verses than Lope de Vega, more tragedies than Dryden, and more epic poems than Blackmore;" and many years afterwards he told a friend that he had had a plan of making every important mythology the basis of a narrative poem, adding that if 'Thalaba' had been more successful he should have accomplished his whole design, and produced such a poem every year. Indeed, it is painful to think of the extent to which Southey might have burdened the world with poetry if circumstances had been more favourable, and all the more painful when we remember that this eager passion for verse-making, which seemed independent of season and of place, instead of adding to his poetical reputation has done much to diminish it. Southey based this reputation upon his epics, and epic poetry, like wine, unless of the finest quality, is comparatively worthless. It may

be possible to write poems not of the highest order, which shall afford permanent delight; and many a simple piece of verse, owing to some lovely turn of thought, or choice rhythmical melody, lives in the memory a joy for ever. The short lyric poem is remembered because it soothes the ear and touches the heart, and gladdens us with beauty of form; but the epic poet, like the dramatic poet, has a high argument to sustain for a lengthened period, and to succeed in doing this demands genius of the noblest order as well as the consummate taste of a great literary artist. Therefore it is, that the world knows only three or four epic poets, and among these there is no place for the author of 'Madoc' or of 'Roderick.'

Southey's first and boyish epic, 'Joan of Arc,' contains some beautiful descriptive passages, and lines remarkable for their pathos; the reader will be struck also with the author's facility of versification—a dangerous gift as possessed by Southey, who lacked that mastery of language which leads the great poet as though by instinct to express his thoughts in the most perfectly fitting words.

'Madoc,' his second epic, received the warmest praise—of its author and of a few of the author's friends. "William Taylor has said," writes Southey,



"it is the best English poem that has left the press since the 'Paradise Lost;' indeed this is not exaggerated praise, for unfortunately there is no competition." That the poem would "stand and flourish" he had no doubt; but after the lapse of more than seventy years the poet's opinion of his work has not been ratified by the public. It is possible that the research and studious labour he expended upon the work coloured his estimate of it. The reader, however, who cares little for such labour, will probably judge that the action of the poem is languid, the plan ill-considered, and the descriptions often tedious; that the flowers, although not sparsely scattered, are half choked and half concealed by the rank growth of weeds. And yet it is with some hesitation that he will form this opinion of a work which was applauded by Davy, which Walter Scott read through four times, and which kept Charles Fox up until after midnight.

Southey had but little ear for harmony, and it was therefore all the more unfortunate for his fame that he elected to write his 'Thalaba' in a novel metre which is without the dignity of heroic blank verse, or the soothing, satisfying charm of rhyme. Landor saw his friend's mistake in this respect, and observed very justly: "Are we not a little too fond



of novelty and experiment, and is it not reasonable to prefer those kinds of versification which the best poets have adopted and the best judges have cherished for the longest time?" But Southey, on the contrary, was well pleased with his experiment, thinking that while it gave the poet a wider range of expression, it satisfied the ear of the reader. So far is this from being the case, that no one familiar with the lovely harmony of Shelley's verse, or with the delicate music of Coleridge, to say nothing of earlier and later poets, is likely to gain delight from the strange and fitful, and sometimes jarring, notes of Southey. But there is strength in his verse if not harmony, and 'Thalaba,' while it has its wildernesses and arid deserts, can also boast, as indeed all Southey's epics may, many a fair scene of richness and beauty. Splendour of diction and felicity of description occur frequently, but frequently also the action halts, the verse drags, and the reader feels inclined to resign himself to slumber. On the whole, perhaps, the erudition lavished on the poem is more striking than its poetical wealth, and it is sometimes a relief to turn aside from the text to the curious and highly entertaining notes which serve to illustrate it.

Southey himself judged 'Roderick' to be the

finest of all his poems; and Landor, in writing to him, said, "There is no poem in existence that I shall read so often." Charles Lamb, however, an admirable judge, and Wordsworth also, preferred 'The Curse of Kehama,' and without endeavouring to compare the value of the two works, there can be no doubt that they are the poet's greatest and least wearisome efforts. It is singular that in none of Southey's epics are there passages which lay hold of the memory and become a part of one's life. The first consideration of the poet should be to have a worthy action, and the more he strives after this object, the less will he concern himself with the beauty of particular passages; but the lack of what may be called "beauties" in Southey's poetry is due, we think, less to the severity of his taste than to the diffusiveness of his style, which has, as it were, no points for the memory to lay hold of.* With all their deficiencies, however, the student of English poetry can never pass by with indifference these elaborate productions; yet he is not likely to agree with Macaulay, that Southey's poems taken in the mass rank far higher than his prose works.

* "What long work," writes Southey in his preface to 'Amadis of Gaul,' "may not be improved by compression;" but he failed to profit by his own criticism.

Among the minor poems of Southey a few must be pronounced successful. 'The Holly Tree;' 'The Old Man's Comfort;' 'My Days among the Dead are past;' 'The Battle of Blenheim,' and one or two more short pieces have a place and deserve to keep it in most selections of English poetry. His sonnets are comparative failures, for Southey's style, which at its best is diffusive, and at its worst sprawling, lacks the terseness and concentration demanded of the sonnet-writer. The odes which, as Laureate, it was his vocation to write, were as useful or useless as any of the Court paraphernalia of the time. They served their purpose, but their value was contemporary with the events that produced them; and it would have been better for the writer's fame if they had been respectfully buried out of sight, instead of being only half interred in the ten volumes which contain his poetical works.

Southey's ballads, on the other hand, grotesque, weird-like, sometimes horrible, have an attractive power, which lays hold of the reader. "Masterpieces of fantastic beauty," Mr. Forster calls them; too high praise, perhaps, but the best of them are thoroughly good things in their way, original in conception, and highly characteristic of the writer. All his life long Southey was fond of writing non-

sense verses as well as nonsense in prose; he was fond also of dealing with melancholy subjects in a comical fashion, fond of such reading as relates to the supernatural and to the unnatural. He would have delighted, we think, in Hawthorne's romances, and in the ghostly ballads of Justinus Kerner, whose works he does not appear to have known. He would have read also with a keen curiosity, of the marvellous phenomena vouched for by the spiritualists. The ballads, which were mostly written in early life, show the bent of his mind in this direction. Thus one of them tells the story of a woman in whose body the Devil walked for two years after she was dead, so that none suspected but that she was still alive.

> "Yet never to Donica's cheeks
> Returned their lively hue;
> Her cheeks were deathy white and wan,
> Her lips a livid blue;"

and when at length she stands by her lover's side at the altar—

> "That instant from her earthly frame
> A demon howling fled,
> And at the side of Eberhard
> The livid corpse fell dead."

In another ballad, Rudiger, a strange knight,

alights from a boat drawn by a swan with a silver chain, and wins the heart of a fair maiden living on the banks of the Rhine. He has purchased prosperity from an evil spirit by the promised sacrifice of his first-born child, and when by the wife's prayers the knight's attempt to give it up to the demon is defeated—

> "The mother holds her precious babe,
> But the black arms clasped him round,
> And dragged the wretched Rudiger
> Adown the dark profound."

One of the best known of Southey's ballads is 'The Old Woman of Berkeley,' a ghastly story of a witch who, when upon her death-bed, begs that her son the monk and her daughter the nun may be fetched with speed. They bring with them the Holy Sacrament, at the sight of which the Old Woman shrieks in despair. "Take it away," she cries, while her lip trembles with agony and the sweat runs down her brow. She then confesses that she has rioted in all kind of sin, has sucked the breath from sleeping babes, called the dead from their graves, and anointed herself with infant's fat. Little hope that one who has troubled the dead man's grave shall find rest in her own! Neverthe-

less, she begs her children to sprinkle her shroud with holy water, to fasten her stone coffin with iron bars and chain it with three chains to the church floor, to see that fifty choristers defend her bier day and night with holy hymns, to toll the church bells to bar the church door after evensong, and to do this for three days and nights till the fourth morning, and then peradventure she may rest in her grave. All is done according to the Old Woman's request. The priests pray, the choristers sing, the bell tolls loud, and the monk and nun tell their beads through the first night; but in spite of these pious acts they hear the fiends outside making a hideous roar. On the second night the tapers burn dismally and blue.

> "And yells and cries without arise
> That the stoutest heart might shock,
> And a deafening roaring like a cataract pouring
> Over a mountain rock."

Terrible is the din, but louder and louder rises the song of the choristers, and the fifty priests continue their prayers until morning light. The third night, strokes as of a battering-ram shake the church door; the bell-men can toll the bell no longer, the



monk and nun forget their beads, the choristers' song ceases, the lights are extinguished, the door is burst open;

"And in he came with eyes of flame,
The Devil to fetch the Dead,
And all the church with his presence glowed
Like a fiery furnace red.

"He laid his hand on the iron chains,
And like flax they mouldered asunder,
And the coffin-lid which was barr'd so firm,
He burst with his voice of thunder.

"And he bade the Old Woman of Berkeley rise,
And come with her master away;
A cold sweat started on that cold corpse,
At the voice she was forced to obey.

"She rose on her feet in her winding sheet,
Her dead flesh quivered with fear,
And a groan like that which the Old Woman gave.
Never did mortal hear."

Then she follows her master to the church door, where stands a black horse, upon which the Devil flings her, leaping up in front.

"And away like the lightning's speed they went,
And she was seen no more."

Southey wrote a parody of this tale, entitled 'The Surgeon's Warning,' and a strange story it is. A "Resurrection Man," when he is dying, is terribly afraid that since he has rifled so many dead men's

graves, he will never have rest in his own; so he entreats his friends to bury him in lead and in a patent coffin:

> "If they carry me off in the patent coffin,
> Their labour will be in vain;
> Let the Undertaker see it bought of the maker,
> Who lives by St. Martin's Lane;"

which was done accordingly; and how it came to pass that in spite of this precaution, the surgeon's bones were not allowed to rest in peace, is told with minute and unsavoury particularity.

The story of Hatto and the rats, so admirably sung by Southey, is familiar to everyone; for have we not all seen the tower in which the wicked Bishop thought to escape from the judgment pronounced upon him? In vain, however, for the army of rats swam the river by myriads, and climbed the shore, and made their way to the tower.

> "Down on his knees the Bishop fell,
> And faster and faster his beads did he tell,
> As louder and louder, drawing near,
> The gnawing of their teeth he could hear.
>
> "And in at the windows and in at the door,
> And through the walls helter-skelter they pour,
> And down from the ceiling and up through the floor,
> From the right and the left, from behind and before,
> From within and without, from above and below,
> And all at once to the Bishop they go.

They have whetted their teeth against the stones,
And now they pick the Bishop's bones;
They gnawed the flesh from every limb,
For they were sent to do judgment on him!"

In several of the ballads the Devil plays a conspicuous part; for Southey, although after early life orthodox in creed and a sound Churchman to boot, treated the evil spirit with contemptuous pleasantry as a goblin or imp of darkness rather than as a being to be abhorred and dreaded of all Christian souls. Among his poems of this class 'The Pious Painter' and 'Cornelius Agrippa' are perhaps the cleverest. Very admirable too is the short and spirited tale of 'St Romuald,' which opens with a Frenchman stopping at an inn door and asking the landlord whether the holy saint was still to be found in his cell, to which the man replies sadly that he has left the neighbourhood. And then the innkeeper describes St. Romuald's sanctity as proved by his love of dirt, and relates the fierce conflicts he had with Satan, who used to maul him like a Turk.

"'But,' quoth the Traveller, 'wherefore did he leave
A flock that knew his saintly worth so well?'
'Why,' said the landlord, 'Sir, it so befell
He heard unluckily of our intent

To do him a great honour: and you know,
He was not covetous of fame below,
And so by stealth one night away he went.'

"'What might this honour be?' the Traveller cried;
'Why, Sir,' the host replied,
'We thought perhaps that he might one day leave us;
And then should strangers have
The good man's grave,
A loss like that would naturally grieve us,
For he'll be made a Saint of to be sure—
Therefore we thought it prudent to secure
His relics while we might;
And so we meant to strangle him one night.'"

The love of the incongruous, of the mystical, of the ridiculous, was as much a part of Southey's nature as the sober melancholy and the calm-sightedness which led him at the height of his prosperity to write mournfully of life, and to look forward to the grave with hope. Overflowing as he was with intellectual activity, and possessing the frolicsomeness of spirit which most men leave behind them with their boyhood, his tears were drawn forth even more readily than laughter, and if there is comparatively little pathos in his writings, his life was marked by the deepest feeling, and by a mournful tenderness as beautiful as it is affecting. It is probable that Southey instinctively avoided pathetic subjects when writing poetry, and that he

did so in later life may be judged from the following beautiful stanzas, written in 1829 :

"Nor marvel you if I prefer
Of playful themes to sing,
The October grove hath brighter tints
Than Summer or than Spring.

"For o'er the leaves before they fall
Such hues hath Nature thrown,
That the woods wear in sunless days
A sunshine of their own.

"Why should I seek to call forth tears?
The source from whence we weep
Too near the surface lies in youth,
In age it lies too deep."

As a poet, Southey cannot be classed with the great English masters; as a prose writer, his manly, simple, flexible style may be regarded as a model. In reading his books, the attention is not immediately drawn to the form of the composition, as in the case of such mannerists as Lord Macaulay and Mr. Carlyle, but when it is examined it will be found to fulfil admirably the purpose of the writer.

"The reason why so many persons write ill," he said, "is because they think it necessary to write a style something different from the common speech." Southey was in no danger of falling into an error of this kind. He used the simplest

words to express his thoughts, and it is never possible to mistake his meaning. No modern writer states facts more clearly or more honestly, but the judgment which he draws from his facts is often curiously perverse. The power of forming a wise judgment was not one of Southey's intellectual privileges. Like his friend Landor, he had the peculiarity, as Mr. Forster has pointed out, of putting the imagination and passions in the place of reason, and of thinking thus and thus by the mere force of his will and pleasure. "It was not ill said by an acute observer who knew them both, that their fault was not that of blindness to the truth so much as that of indifference to give it welcome unless as a discovery or possession of their own." This is true, we think, but true in a larger degree of Landor than of his friend. Southey had strong feelings, and reached his decisions by their help. He had not time to think out a subject calmly, and he was far too impetuous to judge of any serious question impartially. That the opinions of his early and ardent youth were not those of his mature manhood, can excite no wonder. Most men of original power pass through one or more mental revolutions before they find rest for the intellect and the heart, and to this rule Southey formed no ex-

ception. His fault lay in his unwillingness to gra
to others the freedom of which he had made suc
ample use himself; but his integrity, so often que
tioned in his lifetime, may now be regarded a
unimpeachable. "He has convinced me," wrote
shrewd observer, "of the perfect exemption of h
mind from all dishonourable motives in the chan
which has taken place in his practical politics a
philosophy;" and the publication of Southey's cor
spondence has confirmed the judgment of Cra
Robinson.

There are some illustrious men who are ne
rash in speech, and who speak and write to th
intimate friends with the most circumspect w
dom. They rarely make a mistake, or commit
absurdity; their propriety is exquisite, and w
they die it may be safe to produce their corresp
dence without much editorial supervision. Sout
was not one of these men; he wrote often rashly a
thoughtlessly, and his hasty words, which expres
in many instances a momentary prejudice or feeli
have had the misfortune to be preserved in pri
"In days of old," he once wrote, as if anticipati
the injury that would be done him, "when an auth
was dead and buried, *Requiescat in Pace* might ha
been written on his tombstone: but those days a



past, and he must expect now to be dissected and embalmed, to have his rags presented as relics, and to be canonized by his devotees." The "rags" have been zealously flaunted by Southey's "devotees;" but there is some comfort in the thought that, thanks to the mode of presentation, they have failed to attract attention.

It cannot be denied, moreover, that reckless opinions are to be often found in his published works as well as in his correspondence, and thus it has come to pass that the most trustworthy of writers is at the same time the least satisfactory of guides. Thus, for instance, Southey does not scruple to assert in print that the political economists "are to the Government of this country such counsellors as the magicians were to Pharaoh; whosoever listens to them has his heart hardened:" and he terms the 'Wealth of Nations' "a tedious and hard-hearted book, greatly overvalued even on the score of ability." He denounces our manufacturing system as a pest to society, which debases all who are engaged in it; he declares that "the Protestant cause sustained more injury from the English Puritans than from all the efforts of Spain and Austria combined, and of France also, when France put forth its strength against it;" and that the

Puritans should be held up "to contempt and infamy and abhorrence." Again and again the liberal-minded reader is moved to something like contempt, or aroused to fierce anger, by the extravagant and narrow opinions put forth by Robert Southey. And yet Southey could write, expressing herein a feeling of which many of us must have been conscious, "I have an instinctive horror of bigotry. When Dissenters talk of the Establishment they make me feel like a High Churchman, and when I get among High Churchmen I am ready to take refuge in Dissent." On some points, it is but fair to add, Southey was in advance of his age. He writes wisely in many places of the imperative necessity of a national education, and he was one of the first to press upon the public the services that might be rendered by Protestant sisters-of-mercy and by ladies properly trained as hospital nurses.

In the Preface to the collected edition of his poems, Southey remarks that it was the greatest of all advantages to him to have lived more than half his life in retirement, conversing with books rather than men; but the reader who follows the poet's career will probably arrive at a precisely opposite conclusion. "Beware that you be not swallowed up in books," wrote John Wesley, and

this assuredly was in many respects the misfortune of his biographer. "He was never happy," said Rogers, "except when making or reading a book;" and so inveterate was this love of solitary study, that in society Southey, feeling that he had little conversational power, would "roll himself up like a hedgehog." Solitude may have many advantages, but it is scarcely calculated to produce breadth of thought or freedom from prejudice; and Southey, brooding tenderly and constantly over the wealth of his own mind, was not likely to discover its deficiencies. He needed collision with other intellects; but this salutary contact with his fellows he disliked, and, as much as possible, avoided.

If we reckon his 'Quarterly Review' articles, Southey produced in all nearly two hundred volumes, in itself a small library. Many of these works are more likely to be consulted than to be read; while some on which the writer set most count must stand, it is to be feared, on the shelves which contain (to use Lamb's familiar epithet) the books that are not books. Southey's *magnum opus*, the 'History of Portugal,' was destined never to be finished; but a portion of this vast undertaking, the 'History of Brazil,' was accomplished to the entire satisfaction of the historian, who said that ages hence it will be



found among those works which are not destined to perish, and be to the Brazilians, when they shall have become a powerful nation, what the work of Herodotus is to Europe. The prophecy cannot be contradicted, but it may fairly be questioned; and when we remember how many prophecies Southey made in his life-time, which have already turned out to be delusions, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that this also will prove a blunder. The 'History of Brazil' was an enormous achievement, but it was labour ill-bestowed; and Sir Walter Scott characterizes it wisely, when he says, in writing to the author, "A more faithless and worthless set than both Dutch and Portuguese I have never read of, and it requires your knowledge of the springs of human action and your lively description of 'hair-breadth 'scapes' to make one care whether the hog bites the dog or the dog bites the hog."

Still less satisfactory in its results was the toil bestowed by Southey on his 'History of the Peninsular War,' a work which has been since accomplished with consummate ability by a military historian. The Duke of Wellington spoke of Southey's History as wholly inadequate, and as displaying gross ignorance, which was likely enough in matters of military detail; and here too, as in so many of

his works, he wasted his strength and wearied the reader's patience by a display of useless erudition. Well would it have been for Southey's fame had he attended to the wise axiom of Dryden, which that great poet, by the way, often forgot himself: "An author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought."

The truth is, and scores of instances might be cited in proof of it, that the Poet-Laureate, with all his ingenuity and learning and perseverance, and with a literary ability that might have enabled him to put what he knew in an agreeable form, missed the mark again and again. He could not, for the life of him, distinguish between the topics to which he was specially attracted and the subjects likely to interest the public; he even thought that he had power to command attention whether his readers wished to attend or not. Sometimes he hit, as it were, by accident on a theme which was fitted for popularity. The 'Life of Nelson' is as beautiful a specimen of biography as we possess in the language, and for this fascinating work we are indebted, in a measure, to the publisher as well as to the author. Southey, though rebelling against the imposition, was happily restricted within narrow limits. He could have made the book, he said,



ten times as long, and there can be no doubt that if he had had his way he would have done so and have spoilt it.

His love of digression, of ingenious trifling, and of exhibiting in a half-serious, half-grotesque fashion, the results of his prodigious acquisitions, is notably exhibited in 'The Doctor,' a book which charms and annoys the reader by turns. "How beautiful!" he exclaims, on reading one page: "How horribly wearisome!" he sighs out, on turning to the next. On the whole, perhaps the fatigue predominates over the pleasure, although there are moods of happy indolence in which this medley of humour, nonsense, and wisdom may prove a grateful opiate. It has been said with some truth of Mr. Trollope's singularly clever novels, that they may be taken up at almost any time with pleasure, and laid down again without serious regret, and perhaps a similar criticism may be passed upon 'The Doctor.' In its best chapters it is eminently good, but it will *keep*, and no anxiety is felt to follow continuously the writer's footsteps. Open on any page, and some beautiful thought, or quaint suggestion, or amusing anecdote will attract attention; but the reader is not allured on by what he reads, and deems it but little consequence on which page he may alight.

We said that 'The Doctor' may, to certain persons and at certain times, prove an agreeable sedative; but just as there are people who become excited instead of soothed by opium, so there are readers, we suspect, whom this strange book will irritate almost beyond endurance. The preface to Wordsworth's 'Excursion' gave William Blake, the poet-artist, a stomach complaint, which nearly killed him; 'The Doctor,' with its impertinent digressions and its perpetual movement towards a point it never attains, might produce a nervous attack.

The great charm of Southey's style, and his consummate skill as a biographer, are perhaps best displayed in the 'Life of Wesley;' but here, too, his want of logical power is everywhere apparent. The facts which he states with scrupulous fidelity often palpably contradict the inferences he draws from them. Nor is this all; for the opinion of the writer, as given on one page, is sometimes entirely opposed to the opinion he utters on another, and at variance with his known principles. His intuitions are often right, his deliberate judgment, if such it may be called, is frequently wrong. Southey acknowledges that he could not stand severe thought, and indeed he was too busy a man in his profession to be a profound thinker.



Southey's contributions to the literature of English poetry are not many, but they are so able that it is to be deplored he did not carry out his intention of continuing the 'History' left so imperfect by Warton. His knowledge of the subject was immense, and he might have produced a narrative full of critical and biographical interest and written in the purest English, which would have formed a text-book for students. His 'Life of Cowper," although in parts a little languid and diffusive, shows how admirably Southey could write about poets and poetry; but in this department of literature, as in others, he appears to have expended much comparatively useless strength. This was partly owing to his singular kindness of heart, which led him again and again to befriend those who needed help and deserved it. Southey, for example, by his friendship for Kirke White while living, and by the publication of his 'Remains' after his decease, produced an interest in that young poet, which, to judge from the poems he left behind him, was far beyond his deserts. The 'Lives of Uneducated Poets' is another work, written with a benevolent object, which, if looked at apart from the kindly purpose of the writer, must be regarded as waste labour; but while we regret that the claims upon

Southey prevented him oftentimes from accomplishing the work for which he was most fitted, it is pleasant at the same time to remember how ready he ever was to sacrifice personal aims to generous and self-denying labours.

> "Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust."

With these actions the life of Southey was crowded and ennobled. He said many a bitter thing in his day, made rash statements, uttered opinions of men and measures which will not bear a moment's examination; but he never knowingly did an unjust act, or shirked an obvious duty. To use a homely saying, his heart was all along in its right place; and if, as a politician and theologian, he sometimes indulged in what may be called feminine passion, the life he lived was one of the manliest, and is even more worthy of a place in the memory of Englishmen than his great literary achievements.

ENGLISH LYRICAL POETRY.

Mr. Palgrave, in the introduction to his delightful volume, the 'Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics,' observes that he is acquainted with no strict and exhaustive definition of Lyrical Poetry, and he is content to point out a few simple principles which have guided him in his work. We think that Mr. Palgrave is right, and that he has judged wisely in not giving a definition which must have proved at best partial and unsatisfactory. To say what lyrical poetry is not, is an easy task; to express in a brief sentence what it is, so that if the question be put, the answer, like a reply in the Catechism, may be instantly forthcoming, is well-nigh impossible. And the reason is that the lyric blossoms and may be equally beautiful and perfect under a variety of forms. The kind of inspiration that prompts it, is to be found in the Ode and in the Song, in the Elegy and in the Ballad. Its spirit is felt sometimes where it is least expected, its subtle charm is perceived occasionally in almost every kind of poetry save the satirical and

didactic. Like life, like light, like the free air of the mountains, the lyric is enjoyed, as it were, unconsciously. We brush the bloom off fruit when we handle it too roughly, and there is perhaps a danger lest, in attempting to analyze lyrical poetry, the critic, by his precision and careful attention to rules, should destroy some of its beauty. We have learnt, however, of late years what was not so well understood a century ago, that the critic's office is to follow the poet, not to require that the poet should follow him. The poet, indeed, like all artists, must be obedient to law, but his genius is less likely to lead him astray than the critic's book-knowledge; and of the lyric poet especially it may be safely asserted that the lack of conventional restraint, the freedom to sing his own song to his own music, is essential to success. In building the lofty rhyme of the epic, in the long narrative poem, in the drama, in the satire, some of the material must necessarily be of a common-place order. No great poem but has its weak points, its prosaic details, its matter-of-fact lines. The poet-artist who designs a vast work knows that it cannot be of sustained excellence throughout. If his eye roll in a fine frenzy at one part, it is certain to grow dim and sleepy at another; he cannot be always sublime; and if he could, his readers would grow



weary. His imagination must inevitably flag as he pursues a task which requires time as well as genius, and the utmost he can do is to make his coarser workmanship serve as a foil to that which is more delicate. This has been done with consummate art by Milton, whose sense of fitness and congruity is as remarkable as the harmony of his versification.

Lyrical poetry, on the other hand, will not admit of aught that is of inferior quality. Like the Sonnet, it should be perfect throughout—in form, in thought, in the lovely marriage of pure words, in the melody that pervades the whole. The lyric at its best—as in the songs of Shakespeare and some of the old dramatists, in the "Epithalamion" of Spenser, a poem of almost unequalled loveliness, in the pretty love-warblings of Herrick, in the artful music of Collins and of Gray, in the ethereal melody of Shelley, in the impassioned songs of Burns—belongs to the highest order of poetry. It is the noblest inspiration of the poetical mind, its choicest utterance, the expression of its profoundest feeling. With the exception of Shakespeare and Milton, each of whom, be it remembered, in addition to his dramatic or epic genius, is a supreme master of the lyric, the greatest poets of this country belong to the lyrical class. Moreover, the poems which live in the memory and



which take most hold upon us, are essentially lyrical in character. Not that the most precious of our lyrics are generally the most popular. The finest literary work, no matter what the department may be, will never be the most sought after. It is for the appreciation of the few rather than for the delight of the many. Mr. Bickersteth has more readers than Spenser, Dr. Cumming than Jeremy Taylor, and there is many an essayist of the day whose writings are better known than the essays of Lord Bacon. We are accustomed to regard Poetry as a kind of inspiration, and so no doubt it is. The gift, like the gift of wisdom, cannot be purchased. The poet, like all artists, may enlarge his range and perfect his skill by labour and intense study; but the power comes from Nature, and even when the power is possessed, it can be exercised only at certain periods. Dr. Johnson, indeed, in alluding to this notion, as held by Gray, calls it a "fantastic foppery;" but Johnson, it has been well said, "made poetry by a pure effort of diligence, as a man casts up his ledger:" in other words, he was an admirable versifier, not a poet, and the conditions upon which the highest poetry is produced surpassed his comprehension.*

* We say this with no small reluctance. Johnson was so great a man, his estimates of intellectual excellence are in general so

Poetry is not a profession, and the poet who dreams of immortality cannot write, as Dr. Johnson seems to have thought, and as Southey thought, a given number of lines a day. Verses written to order are as worthless as most prize poems. They may display ability, but genius never. The mechanical art of the verse-maker is, however, often mistaken for the creative labour of the poet, and in Johnson's time especially the one was constantly confounded with the other. We laugh at the old Cumberland dame who, on hearing of Wordsworth's death, exclaimed, "Ay! it's a pity he's gane; but what then? I'se warrant the widow can carry on the business aw t' seame;" but something of the like feeling existed

noble, that it is painful to mention his defects as a verse-maker and critic of poetry. He has written some splendid lines, he had an ear for dignified and resounding verse, but the power he wields in this way is, we think, that of the rhetorician. "His mind," says Sara Coleridge, "was anti-poetical;" and powerful as some of his lines are, there is no refuting this assertion. The defect is obvious also in his criticisms. Read the 'Lives of the Poets,' beyond question his finest work, and note how almost invariably he fails to appreciate, how sometimes he decries with the utmost energy, that portion of a poet's verse which is most essentially poetical. The book was an order from the booksellers, and Johnson's choice of subjects was limited; but no famous author, and Johnson's fame was then at its height, would have been content to omit great poets from his list, and to insert so many names of men who merely tagged rhymes, had he possessed a just and sympathetic appreciation of the treasures of English poetry.

among the poetasters of the eighteenth century, and is perhaps not quite extinct even in our day.

The great age of Elizabeth—an age as remarkable for noble deeds as for noble words—may be taken by the student of our poetry as the birth-time of the Lyric. Some sweet snatches of lyrical verse were produced indeed before that period, and in Chaucer, the first splendid name in our literary annals, there may be frequently detected, under the narrative form, marks of the bounding spirit and sweetness which delight us in lyric poetry. Poets indeed who sing of love can scarcely fail to fall into the lyrical strain, and Chaucer, with his healthy vigorous nature, his love of all outward beauty, especially of the beauty of women, and his fine ear for music, was not likely to be wholly deficient in this branch of the poetical art. A delicious simplicity, a joyous humour, a skill in delineating character, a manly grasp of his subject —these are among the more prominent features of this great poet's work, and in much of it we may detect the spirit of the lyric poet, although the form of the lyric is wanting.

For our purpose, however, and indeed for any notice of English lyrical poetry that is not severely critical, the sixteenth century is the period at which it seems natural to commence our survey. With



the splendid exception of Chaucer (for the works of Gower, Surrey, Wyatt, and others are comparatively of small account), it may be said that our poets performed their first achievements in that wonderful age. And what they did, in the dawn of our poetical literature, remains a living power, so that their words and thoughts influence us and delight us still. The greatest poets then used the drama as the vehicle of their art, and the lyric, although largely employed, was generally made subordinate to the requirements of the dramatist. Not always, however; and some of the loveliest lyrics of that age, although the work of dramatists, had no place in their dramas, while much sweet lyrical poetry is to be found in Elizabethan poets who never catered for the stage. If we ask the reader to spend a few minutes with us while we open some of these old poets, it is not from any doubt that the choicest poems which they have written are already familiar and beloved. Those who know them best, however, will be perhaps the best pleased to refresh their memory, and that they may do so, allusion will often serve the purpose of quotation.

Of course the first name we think of is that of Shakespeare, who is not only the greatest of dramatists, but stands in the front rank of lyrical poets. But of Shakespeare, simply because he is so great and be-



cause his words are so well known to all who read the English tongue, it is scarcely needful to say anything. There is nothing in poetical literature more entirely lovely, more delicately fragrant, more graceful in form, more like music, which once heard must be remembered always, than the songs or snatches of song scattered through the works of Shakespeare. They are as fresh as roses just bursting into bloom, as grateful as the perfume of violets, or the scent of the sea when the wind blows the foam in our faces. And we are content to enjoy them without criticism, as we enjoy the warmth of the sun, the merry prattle of children, or the soothing sound of running waters. There seems no art in these little pieces, which appear to fall from the poet like notes from a bird, but—

> "—though the poet's matter nature be,
> His art doth give the fashion."

"Full fathom five thy father lies;" "Under the greenwood tree;" "When icicles hang by the wall;" "When daisies pied and violets blue;" "Where the bee sucks;" "Fear no more the heat o' the sun;" "Come away, come away, Death;"—it is enough surely to quote in this way the first line of a Shakesperian song in order to recall it to the memory, and to convince a forgetful reader that the charm of



musical song is as much one of Shakespeare's gifts, as the superlative imagination which enabled him to see through the deeds of men. Several of the Elizabethan poets show an ear for melody, and a knowledge of lyrical form, which give an abiding vitality to their verse. Webster, one of the most powerful, although far from the most pleasing, of Shakespeare's contemporaries, throws his grim strength into tragedy which sometimes borders on the grotesque. He heaps horror upon horror with a vehemence of language which enchains the reader while it appals him; but this gloomy poet does now and then venture upon a lyrical strain, sad indeed according to his wont, but at the same time beautiful. Here, for instance, are ten quaint lines worthy almost of Shakespeare:

> "Call for the robin-redbreast and the wren,
> Since o'er shady groves they hover,
> And with leaves and flowers do cover
> The friendless bodies of unburied men.
> Call unto his funeral dole
> The ant, the field-mouse, and the mole,
> To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm,
> And (when gay tombs are robbed) sustain no harm;
> But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,
> For with his nails he'll dig them up again."

This song is entitled by Mr. Palgrave 'A Land Dirge,' and with good judgment he places it on the same page with the sea dirge sung by Ariel. A



lovely little song of somewhat similar character by Beaumont and Fletcher, might have aptly followed these two famous pieces. It is sung by Aspasia in 'The Maid's Tragedy.'

"Lay a garland on my hearse
Of the dismal yew;
Maidens, willow branches bear,
Say, I died true.

"My love was false, but I was firm
From my hour of birth.
Upon my buried body lie
Lightly, gentle earth!"

In their lyrics these twin poets approach sometimes very near to Shakespeare—so near indeed that it might seem as if they had caught the echo of his verse; and we think that Hazlitt is correct in his judgment, that, while as dramatists they rank in the second class, they belong to the first order as lyrical and descriptive poets. If we may judge from the 'Faithful Shepherdess,' Fletcher's genius as a lyrist surpassed that of Beaumont; and it is infinitely sad that so lovely a lyrical drama should be deformed by gross coarseness, and by passages which, viewed simply from the artist's standing point, are out of place in such a work. Coleridge wished that Beaumont and Fletcher had written poems rather



than plays. Had they done so, instead of pandering, as they too often did, to the corrupt tastes of the town, we might have had lyrics from these brother poets worthy of a place with the youthful poems of Milton. There is a little poem ascribed to Beaumont, although it appears in the 'Nice Valour,' a play of Fletcher's, which must have suggested the opening lines of 'Il Penseroso.' So perfect is its beauty, so delicious its music, that it is not surprising it laid hold of Milton and prompted him to utter on a like subject his own beautiful thoughts.

"Hence all you vain delights,
As short as are the nights
Wherein you spend your folly!
There's nought in this life sweet,
Were men but wise to see 't,
But only melancholy;
O sweetest melancholy!

"Welcome folded arms and fixèd eyes;
A sigh that piercing mortifies;
A look that's fastened to the ground;
A tongue chained up without a sound!

"Fountain-heads and pathless groves,
Places which pale Passion loves!
Moonlight walks, when all the fowls
Are warmly housed, save bats and owls!
A midnight bell, a parting groan!
These are the sounds we feed upon;
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley;
Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy."

It was Francis Beaumont also who wrote the lines on Life, which may remind the reader of similar but not more striking verses on the same topic.

"Like to the falling of a star,
Or as the flights of eagles are,
Or like the fresh spring's gaudy hue,
Or silver drops of morning dew,
Or like a wind that chafes the flood,
Or bubbles which on waters stood—
Even such is man, whose borrow'd light
Is straight called in and paid to-night:
The wind blows out, the bubble dies,
The spring entombed in autumn lies,
The dew's dried up, the star is shot,
The flight is past, and man forgot."

Ben Jonson, whose learning has so encumbered his verse as in a measure to obscure his fame, had a sensitive ear for rhythm; and those who know him only as a dramatist have missed perhaps some of the finest traits in his poetical nature. As we read of rare Ben, we picture to ourselves a coarse-grained, powerful-looking man, prodigious in waist, and boasting, like Falstaff, a mountain belly—a man who liked good cheer too well, whose love was license, and who led the life of a town wit in a gross age, when the conscience of a playwright was not likely to be over-sensitive. London life he understood in all its variety; and as the leader of the Apollo Club,

we can picture him enjoying the same kind of honour which was bestowed some years later upon Dryden. Such a man, you might say, was not likely to babble of green fields, or to sing the sweet songs which are inspired by an open-air life, or by that faith in the beauty and purity of womanhood which is the reward of honest thought and generous aspirations. Nevertheless, this fine dramatist, man-about-town though he was, and far, it is to be feared, from a cleanly liver, had an eye for natural loveliness and a heart susceptible to the grace of womanly charms, and of all that is lovely and of good report, which surprises and delights us as we read his lyrical poems. To know Ben Jonson at his best, as a man, if not as a poet, the reader should gain a familiar acquaintance with 'The Forest' and with 'Underwoods,' under which headings are to be found the gems of his lyrical poetry as well as much of rare excellence in descriptive and rural verse. This tavern poet and town wit knew and loved nature well, and how charmingly he could sing of love might be proved by a variety of examples. Perhaps the song commencing with

> "Drink to me only with thine eyes,
> And I will pledge with mine,"

is Jonson's best; at all events it is the one best

known, and therefore we shall not venture to quote it. Room, however, must be found for one short and dainty piece, which affords a favourable specimen of this poet's craft as a song writer, as well as of his hearty way of making love. It is addressed to Celia, and although imitated from Catullus, is not the less original in tone. The man of genius, when he attempts to imitate, generally transforms:

"Kiss me, sweet; the wary lover
Can your favours keep and cover,
When the common courting jay
All your bounties will betray.
Kiss again; no creature comes;
Kiss and score up wealthy sums
On my lips, thus hardly sundred
While you breathe. First give a hundred,
Then a thousand, then another
Hundred, then unto the other
Add a thousand, and so more,
Till you equal with the store
All the grass that Rumney yields,
Or the sands in Chelsea fields,
Or the drops in silver Thames,
Or the stars that gild his streams
In the silent summer nights,
When youths ply their stolen delights;
That the curious may not know
How to tell them as they flow,
And the envious, when they find
What their number is, be pined."

In another and nobler strain are the fine lines so



often quoted and so quotable, containing, as they do, a world of meaning within briefest compass:

> "It is not growing like a tree
> In bulk, doth make Man better be;
> Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
> To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:
> A lily of a day
> Is fairer far in May
> Although it fall and die that night—
> It was the plant and flower of Light.
> In small proportions we just beauties see,
> And in short measures life may perfect be."

As a dramatist Ben Jonson deserves to be read, and not only read, but studied, for his wit and humour, for his wonderful skill as an artist, for his masterly command of language, for the knowledge his works afford us of the age in which he lived; but we venture to think that his highest claim upon posterity rests on the pastoral and descriptive passages, and on the lovely specimens of lyrical verse to be found in the little volume that contains his poems. Truly does Hazlitt say that Jonson's 'Discourse with Cupid' is "infinitely delicate and *piquant*, and without one single blemish;" and truly, too, does Leigh Hunt remark of his 'Hymn to Diana,' which appears in 'Cynthia's Revels,' and has a place in almost every selection, that "it combines classic eloquence with a tone of modern feeling, and



a music like a serenade."* No man, says Mr. Henry Morley, can be a dramatist in any real sense of the word, who cannot produce good lyrics; a just assertion in the main, and one that assuredly holds good with regard to this great poet.

Sentimental, refined, melancholy in temperament, and inclined to solitude, Drummond of Hawthornden led a very different life to that enjoyed by his friend Ben Jonson. In his verse there is a lack of vigour, but seldom a want of sweetness, and many of his short pieces deserve, in the quaint language of the

* "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
Now the sun is laid to sleep,
Seated in thy silver chair,
State in wonted manner keep:
Hesperus entreats thy light,
Goddess excellently bright.

"Earth, let not thy envious shade
Dare itself to interpose;
Cynthia's shining orb was made
Heaven to clear when day did close:
Bless us then with wished sight,
Goddess excellently bright.

"Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
And thy crystal-shining quiver:
Give unto the flying hart
Space to breathe, how short soever:
Thou that mak'st a day of night,
Goddess excellently bright!"

age, to be called "sugared." His genius is essentially lyrical, and much that is of genuine beauty may be found among his poems. As a writer of sonnets, his rank among our early poets is a high one; but he has produced nothing of supreme excellence, and it is probable that he will be better remembered for his 'Notes of Conversations' with Ben Jonson, than for his own work as a poet. Drummond is one of the few notable poets of that age who did not try his hand at the drama, which was then as popular among men of letters as the novel is now. A peculiar taste and special leisure are needed for an adequate study of the minor Elizabethan dramatists, and it may be doubted whether a knowledge of a few of the masterpieces of Marlowe, Ford, Webster, and Dekker will not suffice to satisfy most students of our early poetry.

The writings of these men partake in large measure of the passion and turbulence of their lives, and the biography of poets has few sadder pages than those which record the careers of Marlowe and of Greene. Marlowe, the famous author of 'Tamburlaine' and of 'Dr. Faustus,' perished in a drunken quarrel; and Greene, after a brief and busy, but grossly dissipated life, died miserably in abject



erty at the house of a shoemaker whose hu-
ıity had saved him from starvation. Both these
ters have left some striking pieces of lyric verse.
ıo does not know the madrigal,

"Come live with me and be my love!"

Marlowe, and the reply by Sir Walter Raleigh?
ɔert Greene has not written any piece popular
ı these; but several of his poems, though dis-
ıred by conceits, have the ring of true poetry.
ɜ beauty of Greene's verse is, no doubt, marred by
ɔerfections. Yet these may be forgiven for the
e of the genuine feeling and Arcadian simplicity
his lyrics. Truly has it been said that he had
ıe gift of song," and here and there we meet with
ttle piece that would do credit to the best of the
zabethan lyrists. The late Mr. Robert Bell, who
l an unfeigned delight in the rich and sweet
sification of our earlier poets, edited a small and
ightful volume, containing the poetical works of
ɜene and Marlowe, which deserves a place in
ry library devoted to English poetry. One poem
ɜreene's commencing

"Ah, what is love? It is a pretty thing,"

would fain quote, but as we must confine our-



selves to a single specimen of his verse, we h selected the following:

"Sitting by a river side,
Where a silent stream did glide,
Muse I did of many things
That the mind in quiet brings,
I 'gan think how some men deem
Gold their god; and some esteem
Honour is the chief content,
That to man in life is lent.
And some others do contend,
Quiet none, like to a friend.
Others hold, there is no wealth
Compared to a perfect health.
Some man's mind in quiet stands,
When he is lord of many lands.
But I did sigh, and said all this
Was but a shade of perfect bliss;
And in my thoughts I did approve,
Nought so sweet as is true love.
Love 'twixt lovers passeth these,
When mouth kisseth and heart 'grees,
With folded arms and lips meeting,
Each soul another sweetly greeting;
For by the breath the soul fleeteth,
And soul with soul in kissing meeteth.
If love be so sweet a thing,
That such happy bliss doth bring,
Happy is love's sugared thrall;
But unhappy maidens all,
Who esteem your virgin blisses
Sweeter than a wife's sweet kisses.
No such quiet to the mind,
As true love with kisses kind;



But if a kiss prove unchaste,
Then is true love quite disgraced.
Though love be sweet, learn this of me,
No sweet love but honesty."

Lodge, also a minor dramatist of the period, shows more of artistic skill than his contemporary as a lyric poet. Nothing can be more charming than his madrigal of Rosalind; and his sonnets, loose in construction and very unequal, have an occasionally lively movement and freshness of fancy which attest the lyrical inspiration of the writer. The best of his pieces appeared in 'England's Helicon,' a collection of pastoral and lyric poems, published at the close of Elizabeth's reign, and reprinted for the service of modern readers by Sir Egerton Brydges. This is but one among many selections of verse which appeared during the period, and the student who would make himself acquainted with the lyric poetry of the age will also read 'The Phœnix Nest,' 'The Paradise of Dainty Devises' (which, however, belongs rather to the reign of Queen Mary), 'A Handefull of Pleasant Delites,' and 'The Poetical Rhapsody,' edited by Davison, which was published at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and contains odes, madrigals, and sonnets by well-known writers of the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. There

is much in these selections that is only curious, but sometimes, and especially in the 'Helicon,' a poetical gem will repay the reader for his toil. To the 'Helicon,' Lodge and Breton are among the most prominent contributors; but here, too, attached to comparatively unimportant poems, will be found the great names of Sir Philip Sidney, Marlowe, Drayton, Spenser, and Shakespeare.

Breton is so little known in these days (he has no place in the best selections of English poetry), that one short specimen of his skill as a lyric poet may be transferred to these pages. The following lines, three hundred years old, remember, run almost as smoothly as if they had been written by a modern poet:

"In the merry month of May,
In a morn by break of day,
Forth I walked by the woodside,
When as May was in his pride:
There I spied all alone
Phillida and Corydon.
Much ado there was, God wot;
He would love and she would not;
She said, never man was true,
He said, none was false to you;
He said he had loved her long,
She said, love should have no wrong;
Corydon would kiss her then,
She said, maids must kiss no men
Till they did for good and all;
Then she made the shepherd call

All the heavens to witness truth
Never loved a truer youth.
Thus with many a pretty oath,
Yea and nay, and faith and troth,
Such as silly shepherds use
When they will not Love abuse,
Love, which had been long deluded,
Was with kisses sweet concluded;
And Phillida with garlands gay
Was made the Lady of the May."

The marvellous genius of Spenser, the poet who beyond all others possesses the finest sense of the beautiful, and whose verse takes us into a land of enchantment, was not wholly expended upon his 'Faery Queene.' He has written one lyric poem of such incomparable excellence as to place him beyond all controversy in the foremost rank of our lyric poets. Truly does Mr. George Macdonald say of the 'Epithalamion,' that it is "one of the most stately, melodious, and tender poems in the world;" and Mr. Hallam, the calmest and least impulsive of critics, writes of this splendid poem with generous enthusiasm. "It is a strain," he says, "redolent of a bridegroom's joy and of a poet's fancy. The English language seems to expand itself with a copiousness unknown before, while he pours forth the varied imagery of this splendid little poem. I do not know any other nuptial song, ancient or modern, of equal beauty. It is an intoxication of

ecstasy, ardent, noble, and pure." Spenser, "sage and serious," as Milton calls him, had ever a high and delicate perception of the passion of love. "Noble and pure" are the words applied by Mr. Hallam to the feeling which finds musical utterance in this nuptial song, and better words could not be used. Yet Mr. Palgrave has omitted this almost perfect poem from his selection, on the ground that it is "not in harmony with modern manners." So much the worse then, we say, for modern manners, which find sensational novels, many of them of doubtful purity, in harmony with the morals of society, and reject as unrefined the manly and simple expressions of loyal love and passionate tenderness uttered in this song. Gladly would we quote a portion of the poem, but the verses will not bear separation, and the supreme loveliness of the poetry cannot be justly appreciated unless the entire poem is read. We may add that another piece of similar character, called "Prothalamion," although worthy of Spenser's genius, is not to be compared to the noble 'Epithalamion' written on his own marriage. The first is, indeed, of high excellence, but the latter is divine.*

* It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader who knows and loves the "Faery Queene"—and what poem is there more worthy

To pass from Spenser to Herrick is to descend from the heights of poetry to a comparatively low level. Herrick lives in the plain, and his beauties are such as belong to a flat country. His verse is often graceful, but it is never elevating; and the pretty love lyrics in which he sings the charms—too minutely specified sometimes—of a score of mistresses, are frequently sensual in tone. Hazlitt has pointed out, that from Herrick's constant allusion to pearls and rubies one might take him for a lapidary instead of a poet; and it must be allowed that

of our knowledge or more secure of our love?—that Spenser's great allegory contains many passages that have the glow and sensibility, the personal emotion and the light happy touch which belong to lyric poetry. And here, by way of advice to the young student of poetry, it may not be amiss to say in words somewhat parodied from those Dr. Johnson applied to Richardson: Do not read Spenser for the allegory; do not let the allegory trouble you, or you will be inclined to hang yourself; read his great poem in the first place for the poetry alone; read it for its exquisite rhythm, for the linked sweetness of its music, for its marvellous perception of all that is beautiful in nature and noble in life; read it aloud, and, if possible, in the open air, on the free hillside, in the glancing sunshine or shadowy recesses of the forest; read it without impatience in the sweet leisure which is the rare privilege of youth, and you will learn to regard Spenser as a dear friend who has given you a new world of sensuous (not sensual) delights. The time may come when you will learn also to regard this "sage and serious poet" as a profoundly religious teacher, whose aim is as high as any entertained by Milton; but be satisfied at first with the qualities that lie nearer to the surface, with his lovely music and rich colouring, and with the joyous strength that carries him so gallantly through his mighty poem.



the use he makes of jewellery in describing the eyes and teeth and bosoms and lips of fair ladies is not a little wearisome. It is impossible to say of Herrick's poetry that it is a perpetual feast of nectared sweets where no crude surfeit reigns. The sweets are to be found in it in such abundance that they are apt to cause satiety; and while women's bodily charms are methodically inventoried, their spiritual features, if we may use the term, are left out of the catalogue. Nevertheless, many of his love poems have a rhythmical charm and a playful fancy that take the reader captive. He will be alternately allured and repelled; won by dainty thoughts daintily expressed, and disgusted with a sensuality and coarseness which, as coming from the pen of a clergyman, must have appeared strange even in Herrick's days. In his 'Noble Numbers,' however, the poet redeems to some extent the folly of what he calls his "unbaptized rhymes." Ease and sweetness are frequent characteristics of his love poems; he has a fine perception of the poetry of dress, and in his epigrams there is a condensation of meaning and an aptitude of expression which give him a high place among the writers of this form of verse.

Every reader will be struck with the modernness of Herrick's language, and will find it hard to

believe that this amatory poet was born before the close of the sixteenth century. Such lines as the following might have been composed by a poet whose hand we have shaken, and who has not ceased to be a singer of sweet songs:

"Bid me to live, and I will live,
Thy Protestant to be:
Or bid me love, and I will give
A loving heart to thee.

"A heart as soft, a heart as kind,
A heart as sound and free
As in the whole world thou canst find,
That heart I'll give to thee.

* * * * * *

"Bid me despair, and I'll despair,
Under that cypress tree:
Or bid me die, and I will dare
E'en Death, to die for thee.

"Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
The very eyes of me,
And hast command of every part
To live and die for thee."

The following little piece of familiar counsel addressed to girls affords also a favourable specimen of his style as a song writer.

"Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow will be dying.

"The glorious lamp of Heaven, the Sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

"That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse and worst
Times still succeed the former.

"Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry."

Herrick was born in 1591, but did not reach his poetical prime until he was considerably advanced in life. Among his contemporaries were several minor poets who exhibited remarkable facility and grace as writers of love lyrics. Waller, who has been praised especially for "the softness and smoothness of his numbers," has left little that will be read with pleasure in our day, and nothing that for sweetness and harmony can be compared with the finest lyrics of the Elizabethan period. Generally he is correct and tame, sometimes he is feeble; and if we allow that at his best he is graceful, and has some felicities of language, we have given to Waller the highest praise that he deserves. Readers will

remember this poet's comparison of old age to a worn-out tenement:

> "The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time has made."

And his lines on a girdle will also be familiar:

> "That which her slender waist confined,
> Shall now my joyful temples bind;
> No monarch but would give his crown
> His arms might do what this has done.
> * * * * * *
> A narrow compass! and yet there
> Dwelt all that's good, and all that's fair:
> Give me but what this ribband bound,
> Take all the rest the sun goes round."

It is seldom that we feel disposed to differ from Mr. Palgrave in his critical judgments, but we cannot agree with him that "the poetry of simple passion produced in Herrick and Waller some charming pieces of more finished art than the Elizabethan."

Among the love poetry characteristic of this period are some lyrics by Lovelace, Carew, Suckling, and Wither, that have the wit and airiness of touch which this style of verse demands. Sometimes, as in the case of Suckling, the poetry is disfigured by grossness; but the liveliness and gaiety of the

stanzas in which this mercurial poet describe wedding are unequalled in our language, and "little foolish counsel,"

> "Why so pale and wan, fond lover?"

will be remembered and quoted as long as th exists a rejected lover who is cast down by the fro of his mistress. And who does not remember noble lines "To Althea," by Lovelace, and equally fine lines addressed by the soldier-p "To Lucasta"? A word of praise must be gi here to Carew's graceful song, commencing,

> "He that loves a rosy cheek,
> Or a coral lip admires;"

and Wither's spirited lines—

> "Shall I, wasting in despair,
> Die because a woman's fair?"

remind us, that out of the abundance of ve poured forth by that prolific writer there is co paratively little strong enough to support t poet's reputation. Wither's facility for verse-maki is extraordinary, and like some other poets of t period, his language resembles our own. Let t reader turn over page after page of the 'Mistress Philarete,' and he will meet with scarcely a phr

or word that might not be employed by a modern author.

Wither's amazing diffuseness, a fault not to be tolerated in lyric poetry, or indeed in any form of verse, has blasted his fair fame as a poet. Nevertheless, the little volume we have just mentioned, which comprises his best lyric pieces, will repay perusal, and the writer wins our sympathy in his attempts, "in spite of fortune's bars," to

"Climb the hill that braves the stars."

Wither exclaims more than once that in writing verse he intends to please himself. If he choose to be long-winded and tedious, what matters it to the critic? if fools weary of his songs, can they suppose that he will make his measures "the longer or the shorter for their pleasures?" He will not change a syllable to suit any man's fancy:—

"Pedants shall not tie my strains
To our antique poets' veins;
As if we in latter days
Know to love, but not to praise;
Being born as free as these,
I will sing as I shall please,
Who as well new paths may run,
As the best before have done.
I disdain to make my song
For their pleasures short or long:

If I please I'll end it here,
If I list I'll sing this year,
And, though none regard of it,
By myself I pleased can sit,
And with that contentment cheer me,
As if half the world did hear me."

In the 'Mistress of Philarete' Wither, notwithstanding the fault which he vainly excuses, has exhibited much sweetness of fancy; and so pure are these lines composed in the heyday of his youth, that the great Puritan poet himself could have found no fault with them in this respect. Occasionally too we meet with a descriptive passage of rare excellence, showing a love for natural objects and the simplicities of rural life. Hallam gives high praise to the lines addressed by Wither to his Muse; but we venture to think he has greatly exaggerated their beauty, when he observes that there is hardly anything equal to them in our lyric poetry of the period.

Contemporary with these men, though born a little later than some, and moving apart from them in a lofty and sublime region which has been attained only by one or two of the world's greatest poets, John Milton proved in early manhood that his genius as a lyric poet would have sufficed to perpetuate his fame, even if he had not lived to

accomplish the chief labour of his life. If he be not the greatest of epic poets—and there is but one that can compete with him for the palm—the author of 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' and 'Lycidas' stands beyond question in the front rank as a writer of lyrics. There are flaws in these glorious works which have been painfully dwelt upon by critics; but in spite of some insignificant defects, these three poems—two of them most admirable for description, and one a pastoral elegy of the rarest poetic beauty—lay hold of the imagination and possess the memory as only the greatest poetry can. They do not merely win admiration, but they are treasured up as a precious portion of our intellectual property.

Turn from them to the finest lyric effort of John Dryden, the 'Alexander's Feast,' and how vast appears the gulf that separates these poets! Dryden's ode is of its kind incomparable. It is written by a consummate versifier, and by a man of brilliant genius. How finely and swiftly the verse rolls along, how full it is of animation, how free from weakness, how great in its variety of language! It is a magnificent piece of poetical rhetoric, but the exquisite and subtle charms of poetry are not to be found in it. It creates no feeling but that of

admiration, whereas 'Lycidas' excites in the reader capable of appreciating noble verse, not admiration only, but a fervour of emotion and an elevation of spirit which lift him for the moment to the poet's level. Dr. Johnson's praise of Dryden's famous 'Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew,' which he terms, "undoubtedly the finest ode which our language ever has produced," must be regarded from our point of view as overstrained. Again we say it is a great rhetorical effort, not a great lyric poem, and in some portions it lacks

> "——the full resounding line,
> The long majestic march and energy divine,"

for which Dryden is deservedly famous. How stiff and prosaic, for instance, are such lines as the following! Instead of the majestic march, it is as if the poet were hobbling painfully upon crutches:

> "If by traduction came thy mind,
> Our wonder is the less to find
> A soul so charming from a stock so good;
> Thy father was transfused into thy blood:
> So wert thou born into the tuneful strain,
> An early, rich, and inexhausted vein.
> But if thy pre-existing soul
> Was formed at first with myriads more,
> It did through all the mighty poets roll,
> Who Greek or Latin laurels wore,

And was that Sappho last, which once it was before.
If so, then cease thy flight, O heaven-born mind!
Thou hast no dross to purge from thy rich ore:
Nor can thy soul a fairer mansion find
Than was the beauteous frame she left behind:
Return, to fill or mend the quire of thy celestial kind.

"May we presume to say that, at thy birth,
New joy was sprung in heaven as well as here on earth?
For sure the milder planets did combine
On thy auspicious horoscope to shine,
And even the most malicious were in trine."

Dryden stands on a high eminence as a satirist and narrative poet. He is also a vigorous reasoner in verse; and his clear, sinewy style in such poems as 'Absalom and Achitophel,' and the 'Religio Laici,' is that of a master of language. In his special domain he need fear no rival; but in his lyric poetry, as in his dramas, the work he has produced is of inferior quality. If this be true of 'glorious John,' it is assuredly equally true of his great rival, Pope. The author of the 'Dunciad,' of the 'Imitations of Horace,' and of the exquisite 'Rape of the Lock,' is in his own way inimitable. The perfection of art, the finest satire, the most graceful play of fancy, characterize these poems, but when Pope attempts the lyric the failure is conspicuous. His 'Ode on St. Cecilia's Day' has been

justly called only a feeble duplicate of Dryden; and Mr. Elwin says truly that his 'Universal Prayer' is a tame composition, and "never rises above the level of a second-rate hymn." The character of the age was not favourable to lyric poetry, and among the brilliant wits who associated with Pope, Addison, and Swift, one or two only have been successful in this form of verse. There are a few fairly-good lyric passages in Gay's 'Acis and Galatea;' and that small poet, who produced also some good ballads, has written one or two tolerable songs. Matthew Prior was far more successful than Gay, and many of his pieces, as we have pointed out in another chapter, have a brightness and quickness of fancy which remind us of Thomas Moore.

Prior deserves, we think, more praise as a lyrist than he has hitherto received; for his success, such as it is, was not due to any contemporary influence. The vein of poetry at that period led in another direction, and when the Queen Anne men attempted the lyric they generally blundered. Such laboured and conventional odes as those written by Addison, Yalden, Hughes, and Congreve on St. Cecilia or in Praise of Music, were not uncommon; but these odes—and there are numbers of equal merit, or demerit, in Chalmers' vast collection—are mere

specimens of the versemaker's handicraft in an age when the sole merit of some writers, called poets by courtesy, was mechanical skill.

Charles Dickens once observed of Thomas Gray, that no poet ever gained a place among the immortals with so small a volume under his arm. And it may be safely asserted that, little as Gray has written, it does not all belong to the highest class of poetry. It is as a lyric poet that Gray has won his laurels, and his best work is limited to five or six odes and to the 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard.'* This elegy is probably the most

* A writer who undertakes to instruct the rising generation in things poetical, informs us that Gray's poems are "extremely artificial in form, but have the merit of being simple and natural in thought." To this last characteristic, he adds, must be attributed the wide popularity of the 'Elegy,' "for it is not deeply philosophical nor without many rivals in its sweet low-toned music. It is, in fact, but the musical expression of such thoughts as would naturally occur to a man of culture and feeling sitting in the twilight amidst the graves of a country churchyard."

This is a curious comment on one of the loveliest of English poems, and on Gray's poetry generally. His odes, no doubt, are artificial in form, but no critic will venture to say that they are simple and natural in thought. The 'Elegy,' on the other hand, has this virtue, and owes to it, beyond question, much of its popularity; but does the writer think, as his words seem to imply, that a poem is greater as poetry for being "deeply philosophical"? and does he think also, because Gray has expressed in the 'Elegy' thoughts that come home to every human heart, and feelings, of which in some dull blind sort of way every reader of the poem is conscious, that this fact diminishes the poet's glory in having uttered them in

popular poem in the language. It lives in the memory of most men who have received a liberal education, and the hold it has upon us is owing to the pensive beauty of the verse, to the naturalness of the thoughts, which are obvious without being commonplace, and to the choice of a subject in which everyone must feel a pathetic interest. When the poem appeared, the leading review of the day observed: "The excellence of this little piece amply compensates for its want of quantity;" and this was all the critic had to say in praise of a poem which ranks with the choicest treasures of poetical literature. In spite of the cold praise of the reviewer, the Elegy gained immediate popularity, which Gray imputed to the subject, observing that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose; an extraordinary assertion, for there never was a poem that owed more to the melody of the versification, and to the exact adaptation of the metre to the theme.*

immortal verse? for this too is the impression conveyed by his criticism.—See 'Studies in English,' for the use of modern schools. edited by H. Courthope Bowen, M.A. King and Co.

* Mr. Kebbel, an admirable critic in his own field, observes that "the lyrical poet deals with individuals, that is, expresses either his own emotions or those of some other person, or else celebrates some particular event," and on the strength of this definition he asserts without hesitancy that Gray's 'Elegy' is not lyrical poetry.

Of Gray's two greatest odes, 'The Progress of Poesy,' and 'The Bard,' little new can be said, for criticism has exhausted itself upon them. Dr. Johnson's fault-finding in his examination of these poems may be sometimes captious, but it contains a large amount of truth. No doubt amidst much splendour there is also much obscurity, much conventional diction, many words arbitrarily compounded, many thoughts that are grasped with difficulty and that give little pleasure when the meaning is perceived. The following severe remarks can hardly be gainsaid: "These odes are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments; they strike rather than please; the images are magnified by affectation; the language is laboured into harshness. The mind of the writer seems to work with unnatural violence:

'Double, double, toil and trouble!'

We think that Mr. Kebbel is too hasty in this assertion. No doubt in form and in certain familiar characteristics it differs from poems which fulfil all that can be demanded of the lyric, from the inspiring strain of Wordsworth in his Ode on 'Immortality,' or from the 'Ave atque Vale,' black with the shadows of eternal gloom, but magnificent in its despair, of Mr. Swinburne. The 'Elegy' is a descriptive poem; but the emotions of the poet are so vividly expressed in it, that even if we accept Mr. Kebbel's definition, we think Mr. Palgrave has done wisely in publishing what he terms "perhaps the noblest stanzas in our language," in his collection of the best songs and lyrical poems contained in English literature.

He has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe. His art and his struggle are too visible, and there is too little appearance of ease and nature." Gray, who found fault with his friend Mason for the artificial structure of his poetry, fell himself into the same error, and the diction of the odes is in the highest degree laboured. Yet there are lines in these poems of superlative excellence—lines which none but a genuine poet could have written in his choicest moments of inspiration. The 'Ode on Eton College' is marked by some of Gray's worst faults, but several of the verses are of perfect beauty; and how lovely is the conclusion, too familiar to be quoted here! The 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat' has also some felicities of language; but why the cat should be called a "hapless nymph" in one stanza, and a "presumptuous maid" in another, the poet himself might have found it difficult to say. The permanence of Gray's fame depends, not on his Odes but on his Elegy; and it is impossible to conceive of any progress of thought or of society which shall make that poem less acceptable to his countrymen. It is founded, to use one of Mr. Carlyle's phrases, on the eternal verities.

It was Gray's happy fortune to move by one of his

poems the universal heart; William Collins—a lyric poet perhaps of equal genius—has not been so successful. Collins' odes appeal, like Gray's, to a limited circle of readers; and there are men of culture and with some love of poetry who are unable to appreciate the peculiar powers of this fine, but occasionally obscure poet. Sometimes, and when in his highest mood, Collins is simple and pathetic, and his language, tortuous perhaps elsewhere, is marked by the most exquisite propriety. Had Collins written nothing else, the 'Dirge in Cymbeline,' the Ode commencing

> "How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
> By all their country's wishes blest!—"

and the unrhymed 'Ode to Evening,' would suffice to keep his memory green. Throughout his short life, or a large portion of it, he had the burden upon him of a great fear and sorrow, and his verse, the growth of a mournful disposition, is full of plaintive melancholy. Perhaps the most inadequate criticism to be found in Dr. Johnson's 'Lives of the Poets' is that bestowed on poor Collins; but the subtle charm of his poetry was not likely to be appreciated by the robust critic who failed to see the loveliness of 'Lycidas.' Yet it is interesting to read Johnson's



statement that he remembered the poet with tenderness; and the praise he awards him as a man of extensive literature, and of vigorous faculties, is of no small value coming from such a critic.

Johnson, strange to say, finds far more to admire in the lyric poetry of Shenstone, whose ideas are commonplace and whose verse is jingling. His 'Pastoral Ballad,' once so famous that it had a place in most selections, is now forgotten. James Thomson, a genuine poet, whose genius, in spite of his artificial diction, has given him a distinct and honourable place in our poetical literature, deserves mention among lyric poets, although his strength lies mainly in description. Either he or Mallet is the author of 'Rule Britannia;' and it may be noted here in passing, that the best patriotic songs or lyrics in our language, and the best battle songs, are the work of Scotchmen—of Burns and Campbell, of Sir Walter Scott and of Allan Cunningham. Burns, the greatest of all song writers, is too distinctly Scottish to be included in this brief survey of English lyric poets. He needed his native dialect when giving utterance to strong passion and feeling, and his purely English poems are comparative failures.

When Burns was delighting some of his country-

men, and shocking others, with his amorous lyrics, a poet of a different stamp was slowly winning his way to fame amidst the tame scenery of Buckinghamshire. Cowper's chief merit, it has been sometimes said, is, that he freed poetry from the so-called conventional diction popular in his age, and drew his imagery, as all true poets must, direct from nature. Burns, a man of a far stronger intellect, did this more vigorously; but his prose is full of affectations. Cowper, often unpoetical and commonplace, is never wanting in simplicity, and in his observation of nature he is unerring. As a lyric poet his place is not with the highest. He has no fine sense of harmony, none of those exquisite felicities of language which abound in Spenser, Milton, and Keats, and which form a striking feature of Mr. Tennyson's poetry; but he has great clearness of expression, and his pathos is profound. Such lyrical pieces as 'The Poplar Field,' 'On the Loss of the Royal George,' 'The Castaway,' and above all the exquisite lines 'To Mary,' will always be read and re-read by those who can best appreciate a poet's work.

Never was there poet who lived more entirely for the sake of his poetry and his art than William Blake. The story of his simple and pathetic life



may be of some service in an age when a noble purpose, and the self-denial needed to attain it, attract less attention and receive less honour than the successful effort to gain wealth or title. Little regard did he give to that which is the daily care of intelligent Englishmen — money-making. He took no thought of the morrow, and was content day by day if only he could earn enough to supply the daily wants. His joy was in his work, and in the exercise of an imagination vivid enough to transform the children of the brain into grand or lovely shapes, to endow them with life, and to enable him to converse with them as with friends. His vast powers—and those who care least for Blake must allow that his powers were extraordinary—never enabled him to gain more than the pittance of a humble clerk, and in his old age he lived with his admirable wife in two rooms, one of which served for a studio, a bedroom, and a kitchen, while the other was kept for the reception of company.

Blake's position, be it remembered, was not due to extravagance, or inconsiderateness, or thoughtless generosity. He was scrupulously just in his dealings, lived always within his small income, and lived too, thanks to his natural refinement and the management of his wife, without the tokens of



sordid poverty. So intrinsically great was the man, that he gave dignity and beauty to the homely objects around him; and so tender and sympathetic was his nature, that those who knew him best loved him with no common love. Blake possessed, if ever man did, "the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever." We are told how in his old age he put his hands on the head of a little girl and said, "May God make this world to you, my child, as beautiful as it has been to me!" and one of his friends writes: "If asked whether I ever knew among the intellectual a happy man, Blake would be the only one who would immediately occur to me." The poet-artist's eccentricities amounted, some may think, to insanity; but they did not in any sensible degree diminish the simplicity and beauty of his character.

As a lyrical poet, Blake's power of conception was far beyond his skill in execution. Style, as Wordsworth has observed, is in poetry of incalculable importance, and imagination will be found combined with exquisite happiness of expression in all poetical work that is destined to enduring life. It is possible, no doubt, for art to overlay nature; but this affords no argument for despising art, of which our greatest poets have always been the profoundest



students. Blake unfortunately did not care, or was unable to bestow the needful labour on his poems. Possibly, and not altogether unreasonably, the poetical deadness of an age which applauded the tame but carefully composed productions of Charlotte Smith and Darwin, of Hayley and Miss Seward, led him to despise the art which had been employed so unprofitably. Mr. William Rossetti, who has assisted in giving Blake a place among the Aldine Poets, allows that Blake was often palpably faulty in his transgression even of the obvious laws of grammar and of metre; that in attempting the "heroic sublime" he generally lost himself in an Ossianic tumidity and mistiness; that he made an arbitrary use of words and symbols; and that of his poems, a certain proportion "is really not intelligible save by an effort of conjecture." Readers familiar with the eccentricities of some living singers will not regard Blake's "tumidity and mistiness" as tokens of a diseased mind. Such faults are not uncommon, and insanity amongst poets, let us hope, is rare; but it is to be regretted that much of Blake's work is on this account utterly without value, and as free from mind and meaning as any combination of words well can be. It might have proved encouraging to the poet had he chanced in his lifetime to



receive the homage, not always considerate, as it seems to us, which is now paid to him by a small circle of admirers. Much that they say concerning him is in the highest degree true, and is expressed, it need scarcely be said, since the chief of these admirers is Mr. Swinburne, in the most eloquent language;* but much will as little bear examination as the wildest outbursts of the poet himself. We start, for instance, when we are told, as we have been lately told in a critical journal, that Blake is the greatest English poet of the eighteenth century. If the writer had asserted that some of Blake's short lyrics were marked by a simplicity and lyrical charm such as no other poet of his age has equalled, while acknowledging at the same time the stupendous defects visible in all but a few of his choicest pieces, most sensitive readers of poetry would have acknowledged the justice of the criticism; but it is something like fatuity to give such a position to a poet, whose loveliest work

* Mr. Ruskin also has spoken of Blake's poems with the highest admiration. "They are written," he observes, "with absolute sincerity, with infinite tenderness, and though in the manner of them diseased and wild, are in verity the words of a great and wise mind, disturbed, but not deceived by its sickness; nay, partly exalted by it, and sometimes giving forth in fiery aphorism some of the most precious words of existing literature."—'The Eagle's Nest,' p. 23.

is always his slightest, and who was unable, unless as it were by a splendid chance, to give satisfactory expression to his most original conceptions.

Blake is most charming when in his most child-like moods. Like his great successor, Wordsworth, the simplicity of childhood attracts, as nothing else can, the spiritual and poetical parts of his nature. Scarcely more than a child himself when he began to sing—the 'Poetical Sketches' were published between Blake's twelfth and twentieth years—he retained a child's heart all his life through. In many of his short songs or snatches of song he shows an exquisite sense of lyrical sweetness; and also a naturalness of mood as rare as it is delightful. The following lyric is said, but the statement seems scarcely credible, to have been written by Blake before he was fourteen years old. It has but one faulty line, the conventional allusion to Phœbus:

"How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

"He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his gardens fair
Where all his golden treasures grow.

"With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

"He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty."

These early poems also include the 'Mad Song,' a lyric which, if composed by a youth in his teens, is one of the most extraordinary instances of precocity on record; and an invocation to Memory that Fletcher might have been proud to have written, and which reminds us of that poet. Three or four of Blake's songs have gained something like popularity. 'Holy Thursday,' 'The Chimney Sweep,' and 'The Tiger,' are to be met with in anthologies, but he has left little work fitted to win general regard. His ultimate position as a painter has yet perhaps to be determined, but it is scarcely a rash prophecy to say that a place is secured to him amongst the lyric poets of his country. Blake, by the way, whose earliest poems appeared before the first publications of Cowper and of Burns, was born early enough to have met Dr. Johnson and Burke, Sir Joshua and



[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

his wit. Wordsworth, calmest and least impulsive of poets, has described what he felt at this period:

> "A glorious time,
> A happy time that was; triumphant looks
> Were then the common language of all eyes;
> As if awaked from sleep, the nations hailed
> Their great expectancy."

And Coleridge, inspired by the same hopes, writes:

> "When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared,
> And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea,
> Stamped her strong foot and said she would be free!
> Bear witness for me, how I hoped and feared!"

On various minds this great movement acted in different ways. If for a time it quickened hope and enthusiasm in the breasts of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, it forced Scott into the ranks of Toryism. In every case, however, it served to stimulate intellectual energy, and whatever political view men may take of this extraordinary period, all must allow that poetry, and especially lyric poetry, gained from it in exaltation and fervour.

The poets we have mentioned have many claims upon our attention apart from the lyrical bent of their genius, but our subject leads us to regard their poetry solely in one direction. If we except Shelley—and we do not feel sure that we ought to except him—Cole-

ridge, great in so many ways, takes the foremost rank in the lyric amongst the early poets of this century. The music of his versification is exquisite; so perfect, indeed, is it at times, that the most able critic would be doing a rash act were he to attempt to alter a single word. Read aloud his 'Genevieve,' and say whether poet ever framed a more exquisite love poem? read his 'Ancient Mariner,' and his 'Christabel,' and the perfect movement of the verse will strike you as much as the dazzling imagination which floods every page with poetic light; or read the short poem entitled 'Verse and Age,' and you will agree with Leigh Hunt that its music can only be matched by some of the sweet strains of our early poets. Willingly would we quote the whole of this little piece, which contains forty-nine lines; but the poem, which is in almost all anthologies, should be known to everyone. The selection of extracts is indeed a constant difficulty in writing upon English poetry, since to quote the finest illustrations of the subject, is to print verses with which readers are already familiar.

Passing as we do now from Coleridge to Shelley, who is his rival in musical expression, it would obviously be absurd to transcribe such poems as the 'Ode to the West Wind,' or the lines 'To a Skylark,'

as examples of his lyrical genius. Of Shelley and of his poetry it may be said in his own words:

"Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory;
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

"Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on."

Like his skylark, Shelley is a "scorner of the ground," and sings the sweeter the higher he ascends. He is the poet of dreams and aerial fancies, of illimitable aspirations, of unsatisfied desires; he seldom walks in the common ways of men; his beautiful voice speaks to us from a lofty height, and if it does not always speak clearly, it is because while singing he is "hidden in the light of thought." His song yields the same kind of delight we receive from the sounds of inanimate nature. The same kind, but in a larger degree, for the words Shelley addresses to the skylark may be fitly applied to himself:

"Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous and clear and fresh thy music doth surpass."

It seems natural to turn from Shelley, who, in Mr. Swinburne's judgment, is the supreme lyric poet of England, to the young poet whose death he has so exquisitely mourned in 'Adonais.' Keats was such a youth when he died, that it would be ungenerous to dwell too much on the defects of his poetry. His faults—which are such as no mere versifier need be afraid of committing—arose in part from a lack of liberal training, and still more, perhaps, from the influence of the poetical school in which he was a pupil. The aroma of Leigh Hunt's poetry may be detected throughout the earlier poetry of Keats. Whatever is beautiful in colour, delicious in scent, or graceful in form; whatever captivates the fancy, or enchants the ear, gives inspiration to his Muse. His 'Endymion' is too full of sweetness, and it is apt to cloy. But if the immaturity of youth be exhibited in this lovely poem, the student will find the strength of perfect manhood displayed in Keats' later work, and will marvel at the ripe and golden fruit of poetry produced by one whose little life was comprised within twenty-six years. In spite of faults which lie upon the surface of his verse, and need no critical sagacity to detect, what a delightful and exceedingly precious volume Keats has left his country! Genius

breathes from every page of it, and not lines only, but whole poems, attest the author's title to claim a place with the great poets of England. The sonnet upon Chapman's Homer is one of the finest in the language. 'Hyperion' is a majestic fragment; the 'Eve of St. Agnes' has a magnificence of colour and a wealth of imagery which enchain the reader with a spell like that which held Porphyro in the chamber of Madeline; and scarcely any ode written in our age shows a higher power of suggestiveness than the 'Ode to a Nightingale.' Listen but to one stanza of it:

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown;
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

Contrast this poem, or Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind,' with the frigid, conventional, laboured odes which passed for poetry in the last century—they may be read by scores in Chalmers' 'Anthology'—and the difference is like walking in a lovely country with its woods, and meadows, and hillsides fragrant

with heather, after being confined to the formal paths of a London square.

The splendid poetical fruit matured during the first thirty years of this century was for the most part lyrical. Of didactic poetry, of satirical poetry, of epic poetry, the specimens produced were comparatively worthless; and although some dramas were written, we know of none save Shelley's 'Cenci,' and perhaps Lord Byron's 'Sardanapalus,' which retain a living power. Wordsworth, who, in spite of great deficiencies (he lacked passion, which, if not the soul of poetry, is one of its chief attributes), held the highest place, and perhaps still holds it, among the poets of his century, is philosophical, and therefore to some extent didactic; but the strength of Wordsworth is not to be found in his philosophy, much of which might have been uttered more suitably in prose. As a meditative poet, his genius finds its truest expression in lyrical verse. There are noble efforts of poetry in 'The Excursion' and in 'The Prelude,' but there are also long distances in those poems over which the poet plods with heavy lumbering feet. For his highest and most poetical thoughts we must look elsewhere—to the 'Intimations of Immortality,' to the 'Eclipse of the Sun,' to many of the sonnets, which, if they do not bear a lyrical form, are full

of lyrical feeling, to the familiar pieces in which he imparts a human interest to the sights and sounds and life of nature.

Thomas Campbell, too, although he wrote long descriptive poems, and probably thought that he had secured fame by them, is likely to maintain his poetical existence on half a dozen brief lyrics. In some respects he was one of the most fortunate of poets. His 'Pleasures of Hope,' a poem of second-rate value, delighted readers of poetry at the close of the century, and caused him to attain popularity at a single stride. Like Lord Byron, he awoke one morning to find himself famous. The demand for copies is said to have been unprecedented, and the Edinburgh men of letters gave to the young poet of one-and-twenty a generous and even enthusiastic reception. The friendly applause of his countrymen incited Campbell to fresh efforts, and it was not long before he discovered where his true strength lay. Two years later, 'Ye Mariners of England' appeared in the 'Morning Chronicle,' with several other fine lyrics; and in 1803, four years after the publication of 'The Pleasures of Hope,' the poet produced a new quarto subscription edition of the poem, and added 'Lochiel,' 'Hohenlinden,' and other pieces. Not long after appeared 'The Soldier's

Dream' and 'The Battle of the Baltic,' so that the splendid lyrics to which Campbell owes his present reputation, were all produced within a brief period and while he was still quite young. 'Gertrude of Wyoming' and 'O'Connor's Child,' poems of far inferior value to the war lyrics, appeared, indeed, some years later; but, even if we allow to these poems the praise they have received from some critics, and so give a larger space to Campbell's poetical life, the fact remains that that life was virtually extinct soon after he had attained the age of thirty. What he did at a later period has but slight vitality, and cannot be taken into account in any estimate of his genius. Campbell lived to be sixty-seven; but the latter half of his life contributed nothing to his fame, and may be said, indeed, to have diminished it, for he undertook to work for the booksellers, and did his work badly. He appears to have been irresolute, irritable, and lazy—evils caused, no doubt, by physical infirmity; and thus we have the singular instance of a man possessing a fine imagination and high powers of intellect, leaping almost at a bound to the height of his reputation, and showing no further signs of intellectual progress.

Some writers upon poetry—notably Mr. E. S. Dallas, in his remarkable work, 'Poetics'—confound-

ing the lyric with the song, declare that while England is strong in the drama she is weak in the lyric. This conclusion is due to a misconception. A song is, no doubt, a lyric; but a lyric—witness Wordsworth—need not be a song, and most of the finest lyrical poems we possess take another shape. As song writers, our English poets must yield the palm to Scotland, perhaps to Ireland; but as lyrists they occupy the first rank, and the sceptic has only to read with the care it merits Mr. Palgrave's selection, which covers the poetry of three centuries, to be convinced that the poetical genius of England finds in this direction its highest expression, or, rather, that it is as great in the lyric as in the drama.

Sir Walter Scott has given the world more of genuine healthful pleasure than any author of this century, than any writer, indeed, in the language, with the one great exception of Shakespeare. George Eliot alludes to him affectionately in 'Middlemarch' as "that beloved writer who has made a chief part in the happiness of many young lives." But it is not the young alone who joy in Scott. He has been the delight of men of every kind of intellectual eminence, of Keble and Hawthorne, of Watt and Goethe, of Robertson and Dean Stanley. And

this delight is of a kind which no novelist could impart who was not at the same time a great poet. Scott's finest and most lasting work has no doubt been done in prose, and there is more genius in the 'Antiquary,' or in the 'Bride of Lammermoor,' than in 'Marmion,' his best metrical composition; but whether he wrote in prose or in verse, he was animated by the spirit of poetry; and in 'Marmion,' a poem which it is difficult to appreciate at its just worth in an age when poetry delights in subtleties of thought and intricacies of expression, the fire of the lyric poet gives fervour to the narrative. The death of Marmion is in the highest degree noble; there is no such martial strain in our language, nor anything of the kind equal to it out of Homer; and in another direction Sir Walter's genius for the lyric is also remarkable, for many of his songs possess a plaintive sweetness, a spontaneity, a tenderness and simplicity of feeling which will secure them, one can scarcely doubt, a permanent place in poetry. In some of Scott's pieces the *naïveté* and freshness of the old ballad is blended with the gracefulness of expression which is a characteristic of modern art. No ballad writer of recent times has exhibited so close an affinity to the early minstrels. His 'Bonnie Dundee,' it has been truly said by a writer in the 'Times,' is



"one of the most spirited and soul-stirring" of the Jacobite ballads; and in 'Young Lochinvar,' a modern version of an old story, Scott gives another specimen of rapid and vigorous narrative that would have charmed the wandering singers of an earlier age.

Of Thomas Moore's poetry, even of his 'Irish Melodies,' which contain undoubtedly his best work, it would be rash to say that the favourable judgment of contemporaries will be confirmed by posterity. His poetry seldom goes to the heart of things; his pretty songs give utterance to transitory emotions, to fancies which touch the surface of life, or rather of the artificial society in which the poet laughed and flirted and sung. Some of his admirers have compared him with Burns: as well might you liken a pretty exotic to the mountain heather, or an artificial cascade to a natural waterfall, or the notes of a bird that has been taught to pipe, with the free song of the skylark. Moore was more of a musician than of a poet, and instead of composing music to verse, he wrote his verse to the music. He said he could answer for the sound of his songs more than for their sense; and it has been justly remarked that it is hardly fair to read them unless you remember the air.

Earl Russell once stated, if we remember rightly, that Lord Byron was the greatest poet of this century; that Scott stood next in eminence, and Thomas Moore third. We are not disposed, according to a fashion of the day, to depreciate the genius of Byron. He possessed some of the highest qualifications of the poet—passion, vividness of perception, pictorial skill, and, within a limited range, imagination. Moreover, he had, what Wordsworth and Shelley had not—wit of a high order, and a considerable amount of humour. What, then, it may be asked, did he lack? Just those qualities, we reply, which are to be found in the greatest poets—sincerity and concentration of purpose, breadth of imagination, sympathy with his kind, and the patient culture, without which no poet ever succeeded in attaining the highest eminence in the most difficult of all arts. Of our illustrious poets Byron is perhaps the least remarkable for that exquisite adaptation of language to thought, that *curiosa felicitas* of diction which distinguishes the greatest masters. Oddly enough he asserts somewhere that execution is the sole test of a poet, and yet in execution he is eminently deficient. He considered Pope one of the greatest of poets; but in spite of this extravagant

admiration, he has little in common with the author of the 'Dunciad.' Wordsworth, whom he admired and laughed at by turns, is in reality the master from whom Byron caught the feeling which inspires his noblest poetry. He is strong, however, where Wordsworth is weak, and writes often with a vigour and point unknown to the calmer poet. He is eloquent, too, as many an orator is eloquent—commanding attention and exciting admiration, but leaving little permanent impression on the mind. As a descriptive poet, as the poet of passion, and as a splendid wit, Byron is likely to retain a high place in our poetical literature; as a lyric poet, his position is less certain. There is a period of life in which such a piece as 'The Isles of Greece' sounds sublime, and is recited with enthusiasm. Have we not all heard it shouted by schoolboys, or impressively delivered by young men devoted to the study of elocution? Sound is dearer than thought in those early days; nor is it easy then to detect the faults of a poem, the lines of which glide along so smoothly. What are called his 'Domestic Poems' will always interest, and in a measure charm; but the interest they call forth is due to the feeling uttered, rather than to the

sweetness of the song. The best of Byron's lyrics, however, although not of the highest order of beauty, are worthy of his reputation.

Mrs. Browning's name can never be mentioned without profound esteem, and even by those who were not happy enough to know her personally, without a feeling approaching to affection. It is easy of course to say that she was the greatest of all poetesses. The real question to be answered is, what position does she hold among great poets? In many respects her genius was of the highest order. She had a fine though an undisciplined imagination, an earnestness of purpose, which imprints itself on every page of her work, the largeness of culture which, as we have said, Byron lacked, profound feeling, and a pathos which few readers can resist. She wanted, on the other hand, what Wordsworth wanted, the humour which would have prevented incongruities. Her Pegasus too often gets the bit between his teeth, and rides rashly over metaphors and similes which utterly bewilder us when we attempt to follow in his rear.

It is remarkable that Mrs. Browning's profound study of the Greek poets produced apparently little influence upon her style of composition, and that the very faults most alien to the spirit of Greek



poetry are sometimes visible in her poems. Thus it has happened that some of her sweetest lyrics contain lines which grate upon the ear; discordant thoughts which break the continuity and destroy much of the harmony of the song. This is often evident in that wonderful series of 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'; it will be felt in 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' in 'Bertha in the Lane' (witness, for example, the last stanza), in 'The Cry of the Children,' which deserves to be ranked with what Sara Coleridge designates the "high impassioned lyric," and again and yet again in 'Aurora Leigh.' But defects such as these, if they injure Mrs. Browning's poetry, are but as specks upon the sun in comparison with the splendour of her genius. She may never become a popular poet, though some of her brief lyrics, perfect in form as in thought, should secure general recognition; but her verse will be a solace and a joy to many persons, and those belonging to the fit audience which the poet cares chiefly to attract.

In the sphere of lyrical poetry Walter Savage Landor's amazing genius was too often allowed to run to waste. He wrote most of his verses at a heat, and much of his best music is composed in a dead language. Scarcely any writer of our century

has possessed in such a degree the power of doing superlatively well whatever he pleased to do; but his perversity and untractableness were exhibited in his art as much as in his life, and in a large degree he has shut himself out from the recognition to which he is entitled. How great Landor was, few knew save the men who associated with him on equal terms; the public generally, and even readers of high cultivation, failed to recognise his power. His eccentricities and faults were evident to all; not so his consummate mastery over some of the highest forms of literature, whether in prose or verse. If we knew as little of the man Landor as we do of the man Shakespeare, what a grand conception we should form of this noble writer! But his errors have passed with his life. We can think of him, or our children will think of him, as a transcendent artist and wise man, who deserves a place among the illustrious fathers of our literature.

Writing on a theme so fertile as the one we have selected, a number of striking poems occur to the memory composed by men who can scarcely claim a place among English poets. Henry Carey, for example, is an unknown name in our literature; but he has written a little poem, 'Sally in our Alley,'

which is unique of its kind, and of the highest order of excellence. As much almost may be said for the 'To-morrow' of John Collins, a lovely lyric, which appeared in a volume of the writer's verse, now deservedly forgotten, entitled 'Scripscrapologia.' The Rev. Charles Wolfe would be unremembered in our day were it not for his immortal lines on the death of Sir John Moore. A single song, indeed, witness the 'Auld Robin Gray' of Lady Anne Lindsay, may raise the singer to a place with the immortals, so precious in poetry is quality, so insignificant a factor is quantity in our estimate of a poet's work.

There was a time in the last century when poetry seemed dead, when verse-making had become a trade, and when the sound thought sometimes uttered in rhyme might have been more fittingly expressed in prose. But the present age, so notable for what may be called matter-of-fact aims, so eager in the pursuit of knowledge that might seem inimical to the special work of the poet, is remarkable at the same time for the ideality of its poetry, and among living poets are several whose exquisite gifts lie almost wholly in the direction of the lyric. To these it will suffice to allude, for it is not our object in this essay to examine the lyric poetry of living poets. Consider for an instant what such an exami-

nation would involve. Mr. Browning is never more vigorous, more picturesque, more able to stir the pulses, than when he surrenders himself to the emotion of the ballad, and Mr. Tennyson, who has produced some of the sweetest lyrics in the language, and who, even in his blank verse and in his 'Idylls,' writes with the kind of movement that belongs to the lyric poet, has a claim in this respect not readily to be satisfied. "Lord! what a blessed thing it is," exclaims Dickens, of the 'Idylls,' "to read a man who really can write! I thought nothing could be finer than the first poem, till I came to the third; but when I had read the last, it seemed to me to be absolutely unapproachable." There is perhaps no modern poet who combines with a genius so exquisite, so profound a knowledge of his art. We may add, what the reader can scarcely fail to observe, that Mr. Tennyson's supreme excellence is always to be found in the lyric. The more indeed that we examine the poetry of the age, the more evident will it appear that its principal achievements have been performed in this field. In America, Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Lowell, and the venerable Bryant, to name three poets only out of many, are chiefly to be distinguished as lyrists. In our own country, it will suffice to mention but the names of Sir Henry

Taylor—successful in the song as in the drama—of Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Rossetti and his sister, Mr. Aubrey de Vere, Miss Ingelow, Mr. Buchanan, and Mr. Matthew Arnold (whose 'Scholar Gipsy,' and 'Forsaken Merman,' by the way, are of almost peerless beauty), to show how thoroughly the poetical genius of the time is penetrated with the spirit of lyric poetry.

Looking back over three centuries of our literature, it will be evident that the splendid achievements of this age are worthy of the early fathers of English poetry. It is surely remarkable that the most practical race in the world should have produced the noblest fictions, and the most imaginative verse.

ENGLISH RURAL POETRY.

THERE was a time when the term Rural Poetry was regarded as synonymous, or nearly so, with Pastoral Poetry. The most artificial verse ever written, and which, in its legitimate form, was "a slavish mimicry of classical remains," was confounded, at the beginning of the last century, with the poetry that describes the simple sights, sounds, and occupations of country life, the changes of the seasons, the colour of wayside flowers, the song of birds, the beauty of woods and meadows, and the manifold charms of rivers winding through rich pasture-lands, of sunny nooks, and shady lanes, and forest glades lying close to the haunts of rustics. Before Pope's time, and after it, a city poet, who knew nothing about the life of nature, or the ways of country livers, and who had probably never ventured beyond Epsom or Bath, would sing, as a matter of course, of shepherds and shepherdesses, and produce conventional pictures of the country unlike anything that existed outside



a verse-maker's covers. Edmund Spenser, it is true, following the examples of Theocritus and Virgil, had long before introduced this grotesque form of composition; and a still greater poet had also given a slight sanction to it by the publication of his immortal 'Lycidas;' but these poets—such is the power of genius—could make their shepherd swains discuss dogmatic theology while tending their sheep, without raising a smile; the incongruity of the position being atoned for in these cases by the rare beauty of the song. In the splendid English which Dryden knew how to write, we can enjoy a fable in which the controversy between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England is discussed by a milk-white hind and a spotted panther.

The Pastorals of Pope, although destitute, as Warton has pointed out, of a single rural image that is new, possess a certain smoothness of versification. They are well-nigh unreadable now, and the praise they won at the time from able critics sounds ridiculous to us. Both the poetry and the criticisms upon it are as foreign to modern taste as the euphuism of Lyly; but that Pope satisfied a want of his age—which was eminently artificial and prosaic—is evident from the mass of so-called pastoral poetry that was issued during the first half

of the last century. Nevertheless, Wordsworth is not far wrong in saying that, with one or two insignificant exceptions, "the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the 'Paradise Lost' and the 'Seasons'—that is to say, from 1667 to 1728—does not contain a single new image of external nature, and scarcely presents a familiar one from which it can be inferred that the eye of the poet had been steadily fixed upon his object, much less that his feeling had urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination."

He might have added—for the coincidence is striking—that the year in which Thomson published the 'Seasons' in a complete form (1730), Allan Ramsay produced his beautiful pastoral of the 'Gentle Shepherd,' a poem which is remarkable in many ways, and especially as presenting pictures of rustic life free from the conventional diction and the allegorical personations which deform other pastorals. Ramsay's poem is written in the Scottish dialect: in English we have no poem of the kind at that period that can bear comparison with it, for the 'Faithful Shepherdess' of Fletcher, exquisite though it be, is wholly devoid of the realism demanded in such a work.

Of the Elizabethan dramatists, by the way, few

care to describe with accuracy the varied aspects of Nature. Jonson has some choice descriptive passages and epithets in his lyrical poems—it was he who called the nightingale "the dear good angel of the spring"—but we recall few in his dramas; and it may be questioned whether all the plays of Webster, Massinger, Middleton, Marlowe, and Shirley could supply a page of imagery drawn from the simple objects of rural life.

Shakespeare, great in all ways, is pre-eminent also in what the late Lord Lytton somewhat thoughtlessly calls "the very lowest degree of poetry, viz. the descriptive." In perusing dramas like Ben Jonson's 'Volpone' or his 'Alchemist,' the reader breathes an indoor and somewhat confined atmosphere; in reading Shakespeare he feels as if every window were thrown open, or as if he were inhaling the fresh and fragrant air of the country. And this feeling is often produced by a single line occurring in scenes which are far enough removed from the life of Nature, as, for instance, when in 'Measure for Measure,' the Duke conversing in a business way with the Provost, suddenly exclaims, "Look, the unfolding star calls up the shepherd;" or when, in 'Cymbeline,' the dull-witted Cloten hires musicians to sing under Imogen's

window that most delicious of Shakespearian songs, "Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings," Shakespeare's rural descriptions are, as they should be, incidental; but these incidental touches suffice to make the reader feel the open-air influences to which we have alluded. His affection for the violet is as noteworthy as Chaucer's for the daisy, or Wordsworth's for the celandine; and in the description of wild flowers, of birds and animals, of country pursuits, and pastimes, his accuracy is unrivalled. His 'As You Like It' has been justly called a pastoral comedy. Milton, beautiful though many of his descriptive passages are, and notwithstanding the delicious rural charm that pervades his best descriptive poems—'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'—appears sometimes to have written from book-knowledge rather than from actual observation, and in his rural imagery he often catches the notes of earlier poets.

There are two writers, both of whom lived a little earlier than Milton, who deserve a rather prominent place as rural poets. We allude to William Browne, of Tavistock, and to Robert Herrick. Some years ago a folio edition of Browne's 'Britannia's Pastorals,' with MS. notes by Milton, was sold by Messrs. Sotheby and Wilkinson. The notes are not critical,

but they testify at least to the interest with which Milton had read the volume. In Milton's own works, however, we have stronger proofs than these notes afford, how carefully Browne's poetry was perused. There can be little doubt that the Fourth Eclogue of the 'Shepherd's Pipe' suggested to the greater poet his peerless 'Lycidas,' and in 'Comus,' as well as 'Paradise Regained,' we find traces of Browne's influence. All his poetry was produced in early life, and it won for him instant reputation and the friendship of such men as Drayton, Ben Jonson, and Chapman. Few modern readers will have the patience to read pastorals, in which English shepherds and shepherdesses, English rivers and familiar country places, are curiously associated with river-gods and wood-nymphs; yet the lover of poetry will find much in them to reward him for his toil. Picturesque descriptions, luxuriant fancy, and frequent felicity of expression, are to be found in 'Britannia's Pastorals.' The verse moves sometimes very sweetly, sometimes it is rugged and impeded like a stream held in by rocks; but whether rough or smooth, it is rarely without vitality, and you feel that you are in the company of a poet, not of a mere versifier. If Keats owed much to Spenser, it is scarcely possible to doubt that he owed something

to Browne. There are passages in 'Endymion' which remind us strongly of the 'Pastorals;' and the wonderful picture of Madeline in the 'Eve of St. Agnes' was probably suggested by a description of Browne's, which, if marked by conceits, is not wholly without beauty.

> "And as a lovely maiden, pure and chaste,
> With naked ivory neck and gown unlaced,
> Within her chamber, when the day is fled,
> Makes poor her garments to enrich her bed;
> First puts she off her lily-silken gown,
> That shrieks for sorrow as she lays it down;
> And with her arms graceth a waistcoat fine,
> Embracing her as it would ne'er untwine.
> Her flaxen hair, ensnaring the beholders,
> She next permits to wave about her shoulders.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> Then on her head a dressing like a crown,
> Her breasts all bare, her kirtle slipping down.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> Prepares for sweetest rest while sylvans greet her,
> And longingly the down-bed swells to meet her."

Browne, like most young poets, delights in simile, and uses it lavishly. His best bits of rural landscape or description are produced in this way, and indeed his pages are studded with similes like spring meadows with buttercups. Two or three examples will suffice as specimens of Browne's style. The

following will remind the reader of a passage in Shakespeare.

> "As children on a play-day leave the schools,
> And gladly run unto the swimming pools,
> Or in the thickets all with nettles stung,
> Rush to despoil some sweet thrush of her young;
> Or with their hats (for fish) lade in a brook
> Withouten pain: but when the morn doth look
> Out of the eastern gates, a snail would faster
> Glide to the schools than they unto their master."

Then he describes girls bringing rushes in wicker baskets to strew before the path of a bride, and the Lady of the May distributing her gifts—a garland to one, a carved hook to another, a kiss to a third, a garter to a fourth; he pictures the ballad-monger on a market day squeaking the sad choice of Tom the Miller "with as harsh a noise as ever cart-wheel made," the ploughman unyoking his team, the dairy-maiden who "draws at the udder" when

> "The day is waxen old,
> And 'gins to shut in with the marigold;'

and afterwards "shortens the dewed way" with a song newly learnt; and the melancholy angler—evidently Browne knew nothing of his contemporary Walton, the "common father of anglers," and the happiest of men—standing on a green



bank with "a wrigling yellow worm thrust on his hook." We forget the dreary mythological rubbish which Browne inserts in his 'Pastorals,' in the bright, accurate, and simple representations of English rural life with which his pages abound; and the hearty love he shows for the country, and especially for the beautiful county in which he was born, wins the sympathy of the reader. Here is a brief apostrophe to Devon, which, allowing for its quaintness, all Devonshire men will appreciate:

"Hail thou, my native soil! Thou blessed plot,
Whose equal all the world affordeth not!
Show me, who can, so many crystal rills,
Such sweet-clothed valleys, or aspiring hills;
Such wood-ground, pastures, quarries, wealthy mines;
Such rocks, in whom the diamond fairly shines;
And if the earth can show the like agen,
Yet will she fail in her sea-ruling men;
Time never can produce men to o'ertake
The fames of Grenville, Davies, Gilbert, Drake,
Or worthy Hawkins, or of thousands more,
That by their power made the Devonian shore
Mock the proud Tagus."

Herrick, who lived for nineteen years in a Devonshire village as vicar of Dean Prior, did not reciprocate Browne's feelings, but would seem, if some of his expressions may be trusted, to have found the country dull. He calls London his home,

the blest place of his nativity, and laments that a hard fate had condemned him to a long and irksome banishment. He describes the people as "currish," and "churlish as the seas," and sings in a sort of doggerel —

> "More discontents I never had
> Since I was born, than here,
> Where I have been, and still am sad,
> In this dull Devonshire."

In the sweetness of some of his verses Herrick is probably unmatched by any poet of his age. He sings, bird-like, without a care, and with a freedom that seems to owe more to nature than to art. But it is the perfection of lyric art to appear artless, and in this respect he has, we think, scarcely a rival. His felicity of description as a rural poet seems to show that his dislike of rural life was more feigned than real. We cannot, indeed, agree with Mr. Robert Buchanan that "Herrick's best things are his poems in praise of the country life," because we hold that the lyric beauty of his love poems—'The Night Piece: To Julia,' 'To Anthea,' 'Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may,' for example—is of a higher order, but doubtless many of his rural pictures are charmingly coloured. And they are true to the life. Herrick never produces fancy landscapes. He

described what he saw, and it is evident that his knowledge of rural life was not gained through "the spectacles of books." In a pleasant piece called 'The Country Life,' he dwells upon its delights with a feeling that could scarcely have been feigned, and observes—which is not quite true, by the way—that the farmer's lot is the happiest, because the freest from care.* The festivities of the country,

* "How have all the world cried out:

'O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,
Agricolas!'

But after all, what a flat contradiction is this to universal experience. See the little house under the wood, by the river side! There is *rural life* in perfection. How happy then is the farmer who lives there! Let us take a detail of his happiness: he rises with or before the sun, calls his servants, looks to his swine and cows, then to his stable and barns; he sees to the ploughing and sowing his ground in winter or in spring; in summer and autumn he hurries and sweats among his mowers and reapers. And where is his happiness in the meantime? Which of these employments do we envy? Or do we envy the delicate repast which succeeds, which the poet so languishes for?

'O quando faba, Pythagoræ cognata, simulque
Uncta satis pingui ponentur oluscula lardo.'

Oh the happiness of eating beans, well greased with fat bacon: nay, and cabbage too! Was Horace in his senses when he talked thus? or the servile herd of his imitators? Our eyes and ears may convince us there is not a less happy body of men in all England than the country farmers. In general their life is supremely dull; and it is usually unhappy, too, for of all people in the kingdom

many of them no longer known, are thus pithily enumerated:

> "For sports, for pageantry and plays,
> Thou hast thy eves and holidays;
> On which the young men and maids meet,
> To exercise their dancing feet,
> Tripping the comely country round,
> With daffodills and daisies crown'd;
> Thy wakes, thy quintels; here thou hast
> Thy Maypoles, too, with garlands grac't;
> Thy Morris-dance; thy Whitsun-ale;
> Thy shearing-feasts, which never fail;
> Thy Harvest Home; thy wassail-bowl,
> That's tost up after Fox i' th' Hole;
> Thy mummeries; thy Twelfth-tide kings
> And queens; thy Christmas revellings;
> Thy nut-brown mirth; thy russet wit,
> And no man pays too dear for it."

In another piece he describes the 'Harvest Home' as if many a time he had joined in the merriment;

they are the most discontented, seldom satisfied either with God or man." So writes John Wesley, and it may be added as a noteworthy fact, that the delights of rural and farm life are never sung by the men who might be supposed to know most about them. William Browne, the friend of Selden, was a scholar and country gentleman; Herrick was a clergyman; Allan Ramsay was a barber and afterwards a bookseller; Robert Bloomfield cobbled shoes in London; Thomson, who calls upon Britons to venerate the plough, was the last man likely to put his hand to one; and Cowper, who has described with admirable felicity some of the farmer's duties, was exactly qualified to wind silk for Mrs. Unwin, and never did or could do any harder manual labour than making cages for hares, potting his greenhouse plants, or pruning his vines.

and in another, there is an invitation to his Corinna to go a-Maying, which, although written two hundred years since, has the fresh dew of youth upon it still.

"There's not a budding boy or girl this day
But is gone up and gone to bring in may;
A deal of youth, ere this, is come
Back, and with white-thorn laden home.
Some have dispatch'd their cakes and cream
Before that we had left to dream:
And some have wept, and woo'd, and plighted troth,
And chose their priests ere we can throw off sloth.
Many a green-gown has been given;
Many a kiss both odd and even;
Many a glance, too, has been sent
From out the eye, love's firmament;"

and he adds, with an epicurean conviction, that since the future will bring sorrow, and life is short, and our days "once lost can ne'er be found again," the present should be seized for enjoyment,

"Come, let us go while we are in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time."

Strange that Herrick—whose 'Hesperides' was the favourite volume of country gentlemen in the days of Charles II., whose songs were set to music by Henry Lawes and other musicians of the day, and who, with all his faults, literary and moral, was a true poet—should have been allowed no place in

our anthologies, while such mean rhymesters as Smith, Duke, Halifax, and Harte—men who never wrote a line betokening genius—have had their miserable productions mummified among the works of British poets. Both Herrick and Browne are included in the list of poets "sealed of the tribe of Ben," whom Jonson, in his mature age, and in the plentitude of his power, collected round him in the Apollo Club. The famous dramatist affirmed that Browne's worth was good "upon the exchange of letters." Browne returned the praise with interest, and Herrick, upon the death of Jonson, whom he terms "the rare arch-poet," pronounced that the glory of the stage had departed.

Ben Jonson, it will be remembered, walked to Scotland to see his friend Drummond of Hawthornden—a poet, who lived, as he himself describes it, in a "sweet solitary place," and who might have known much of nature from direct intercourse; but his knowledge is bookish, and his sonnets, graceful though many of them be, are the fruits of culture, and exhibit a second-hand acquaintance with natural objects. Probably, the most lovely piece of rural description produced by any of Drummond's contemporaries is the 'Complete Angler' of Izaak Walton—a perfect prose pastoral, full of simplicity,

tenderness, and natural feeling, and of an intense enjoyment of Nature in her simplest forms. Beautifully does Wordsworth say that "fairer than Life itself is this sweet Book" of Walton's; and the reader who is familiar with it will have marked the fine sympathy with which Mr. Field expressed the feeling and poetry of the volume in his picture exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1872. Walton, who has left such valuable records of Hooker and Donne, of Sanderson, Wotton, and George Herbert, appears to have known nothing of Milton, who was born fifteen years after him, and died nine years before him, nor of Marvell, who died four years after his friend, the great epic poet. It is probable that men were separated more widely in those days by theological and political differences than they were united by a common love of literature and learning. Milton, the iconoclast, the priest-hater, the friend of Cromwell, makes no allusion to the most eloquent writer of his or perhaps of any age—Jeremy Taylor; nor does Taylor, the Royal chaplain, betray the slightest acquaintance with the greatest of his contemporaries, and one of the greatest of English poets.

Marvell made himself chiefly famous as a politician; but he claims our attention as having written



a few beautiful poems, which are impregnated with a fine rural flavour. One of these—'Thoughts in a Garden'—in which he speaks of the mind withdrawing into its happiness and

> "Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade,"

may be regarded, according to Mr. Palgrave—and we think he is right—"as a test of any reader's insight into the most poetical aspects of poetry." This poem is a genuine lyric, and would perhaps with more propriety have been noticed elsewhere. The same remark will partly hold good with regard to the following exquisite lines, which might have taught some of the dull versifiers of a later period how to write a pastoral poetically. The reader who may object to the delicious extravagance of the poem, is requested to bear in mind the youthfulness of the supposed speaker, a "Nymph complaining for the death of her Fawn."

> "With sweetest milk and sugar first
> I it at my own fingers nursed;
> And as it grew, so every day
> It waxed more white and sweet than they.
> It had so sweet a breath! and oft
> I blushed to see its foot more soft
> And white—shall I say—than my hand?
> Nay, any lady's of the land!

"It is a wondrous thing how fleet
'Twas on those little silver feet:
With what a pretty skipping grace
It oft would challenge me the race:—
And when 't had left me far away
'Twould stay, and run again, and stay:
For it was nimbler much than hinds,
And trod as if on the four winds.

"I have a garden of my own,
But so with roses overgrown,
And lilies, that you would it guess
To be a little wilderness:
And all the spring-time of the year
It only loved to be there.
Among the beds of lilies I
Have sought it oft, where it should lie;
Yet could not, till itself would rise,
Find it although before mine eyes:
For in the flaxen lilies' shade
It like a bank of lilies laid.
Upon the roses it would feed
Until its lips e'en seemed to bleed:
And then to me 'twould boldly trip,
And print those roses on my lip.
But all its chief delight was still
On roses thus itself to fill,
And its pure virgin limbs to fold
In whitest sheets of lilies cold.
Had it lived long, it would have been
Lilies without, roses within."

It is possible, as we have seen, to discover n gems of rural verse hidden amidst the works of earlier poets; but just as landscape paintin

England may be said to have commenced with Gainsborough and Wilson, although English landscape painters existed before their day, so, speaking broadly, may Thomson and Cowper be accounted the genuine fathers of English rural poetry. Their descriptions of nature are fuller, and, if we except the incidental touches of our greatest poets, more truthful than those produced at an earlier period, and they led to the more reverent, and accurate, study of nature exhibited by Wordsworth, Shelley, Scott, and Tennyson. Thomson's artificial diction, and his frequent conventionality of thought, have greatly lessened the popularity he once enjoyed. At the beginning of this century every schoolgirl possessed a copy of the 'Seasons,' and could recite long passages from the poem. It is a pretty safe prediction to affirm that at the close of it, if the 'Seasons' are still found upon the shelf, they will be dust-covered, and unknown to all but students of poetry; yet Thomson did a great work in his time, for he brought nature nearer to us, and proved, what ought never to have needed proof, but seemed to have been long forgotten, that poetic thought can gain some of its richest nutriment from natural objects. Pope, who could not describe nature, spoke sneeringly of descriptive poetry; but

no poet since Thomson's day has adopted Pope's view. Between the publication of the 'Seasons' and of the 'Task' lived two lyric poets, whose united verse can be compressed within a tiny volume. "A great wit," said Cowley, "is no more tied to live in a vast volume than in a gigantic body: on the contrary, it is commonly more vigorous the less space it animates." This remark may be fittingly applied to Gray and Collins. They wrote very little, but what they did write is exquisite. Probably, the two best descriptive poems in the language are the 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' of Milton; but Gray's 'Elegy' contains something more than description. The rural imagery of the piece is very lovely; but its pathetic sentiment touches every heart. So perfect is the poem, that there is not a line—scarcely, indeed, a word—that one could wish to see altered; yet it is difficult to believe that Gray's taste was not a little finical when it led him to omit this lovely stanza—as beautiful and appropriate, surely, as any one that is retained:

> "Hark! how the sacred calm that breathes around,
> Bids every fierce tumultuous passion cease;
> In still small accents whisp'ring from the ground,
> A grateful earnest of eternal peace."

Poor Collins died in a mad-house in 1756, just a year before his contemporary, John Dyer, published 'The Fleece,' a poem which, as the title implies, is specifically rural in character. It is a queer medley, for the writer not only aims at poetical description, but endeavours also in heavy blank verse to give a minute account of agricultural and manufacturing operations, which no man, however highly endowed, could treat poetically. The poem exhibits more of knowledge than of fancy, more of invention than imagination; but Dyer's 'Grongar Hill' and his 'Country Walk' are marked by an airiness of versification and a vividness of description which remind us of Thomas Warton. Both Warton and Dyer caught their best notes from 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso;' and Dyer, although he cannot flood his landscape with poetic light, has at least the power of bringing its separate features clearly before the eye.

With two signal exceptions, the poetry of the latter half of the last century bears few marks of high inspiration or of any special intercourse with nature. Then Dr. Johnson produced his 'London,' and 'Vanity of Human Wishes,'—weighty poems, both of them, but more remarkable for manly thought than for poetical imagination. Then

Hayley sung his platitudes, and Darwin his 'Botanic Garden,' and Bloomfield, a small rural poet, chirped feebly of the country, and Churchill ("the great Churchill," Cowper called him) wrote his scurrilous satires, and Goldsmith (of whom we shall have a word or two to say presently), whose wonderful charm of style has secured to him a permanent place in literature, produced two beautiful poems, one of which deserves notice for its sweet pastoral passages. Then Falconer, who was destined to perish at sea, published 'The Shipwreck,' and Grainger 'The Sugar-Cane,' and Armstrong, according to Churchill's verdict, "taking leave of sense," read in verse—

"Musty lectures on Benevolence."

and Kit Smart, the mad poet, whose dislike of clean linen was shared by Dr. Johnson, and who, before his confinement in a mad-house, used to walk for exercise to the ale-house, but was *carried* back again, published indifferent odes, which his biographer mistook for fine poems. Smart also produced a Georgic called 'The Hop Garden,' composed in an artificial, pretentious style, which may have done some service as showing how rural poetry ought not to be written. Imagine

a man deliberately writing a long poem in blank verse, the average quality of which may be judged from the following passage:

> "——Select the choicest hop t' insert
> Fresh in the opening glebe. Say, then, my Muse,
> Its various kinds; and from the effete and vile
> The eligible separate with care.
> The noblest species is by Kentish wights
> The Master-hop yclep'd. Nature to him
> Has given a stouter stalk, patient of cold,
> Or Phœbus; even in youth his verdant blood
> In brisk saltation circulates and flows
> Indefinitely vigorous. The next
> Is arid, fetid, infecund and gross,
> Significantly styled the Friar. The last
> Is called the Savage, who in every wood
> And every hedge unintroduced intrudes.
> When such the merit of the candidates,
> Easy is the election."

No one who has not made it his painful task to turn over such lumber, can imagine what a mass of similar rubbish is to be found in the closely-printed volumes which are said upon their title-pages to contain the works of the British poets. Of rural poetry,—which, if the bull may be excused, is not poetry—the last century produced a load large enough, if a man were doomed to read it all, to make him loathe the very thought of verse. Pastorals, Bucolics, Georgics, follow one another in dreary

succession; and in the futile effort of bad rhymesters to imitate good poets, nature, which is supposed to form the subject of the verse, is left out of it altogether. The latter half of the century displayed on a wider scale than the preceding half, the vices of these arid versifiers, but it produced, also, a Cowper and a Burns, two poets who, in conjunction with, but in a larger degree than Thomson, may be said to have commenced a new era in English poetry.

"What true and pretty pastoral images has Goldsmith in his 'Deserted Village'!" said Burke; "they beat all; Pope, and Philips, and Spenser too, in my opinion." Goldsmith's pastoral images are pretty, and they are true; indeed, fitter epithets could not be applied to them. We may also readily admit that they beat Pope, who was the poet of society; neither is it much to say that they beat Philips, too,—"namby-pamby" Philips, whose pastorals were ridiculed so cleverly by Pope in the 'Guardian;' but to compare Goldsmith's rural pictures with the broad and splendid landscape of Spenser is to confound things that essentially differ, unless, indeed, Burke had the 'Shepherd's Calendar' in mind, and not the 'Faery Queene.'

Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village' was published in

1770, the year in which Wordsworth was born; Cowper's 'Task' appeared in 1785, and the influence of that poem on our poetical literature can scarcely be over-estimated. Mr. Lowell, whose critical judgment is almost always sound, has said that, in his opinion, "Cowper is still the best of our descriptive poets for everyday wear," and in these words he does justice to his homely and sterling qualities. Cowper frequently takes false views of politics and society; he has strong prejudices, great weaknesses, and for some of his mistakes we can only find an excuse in the malady that consumed him; but in his love and knowledge of nature he is always sympathetic, always veracious, and it is not difficult to credit his assertion that he took nothing at second-hand. A critic has said recently: "It is utterly idle to contend that Cowper came within leagues of Pope as a poet;" but, in spite of this decision, it is a question that from one point of view may be not unreasonably discussed. The influence of poets upon poets is, perhaps, the most striking proof of their genius. Spenser's power over his successors has been well-nigh limitless; and it may be safely said that the poetical sway of Cowper has not only been more beneficial, but also more extended than that of Pope, whose school, as Southey remarked,

has produced no poet. Cowper had not the delicate fancy displayed by Pope in the 'Rape of the Lock,' nor had he the trenchant wit which entitles Pope to be ranked as our greatest satirist in verse; but, on the other hand, he had rare gifts scarcely known to his predecessor, a pathos surpassingly tender, a humour of which Pope had no trace, and above all the poet's gift, yet a gift denied to Pope, of describing and interpreting nature.

Crabbe, who followed Cowper, and who holds a distinct position among our descriptive poets, represents nature with the fidelity and coarseness of Ostade or Jan Steen. His descriptions of scenery, like his descriptions of character, are wonderfully truthful, but, having no sense of beauty, he sees little that is not repulsive in either. Like Cowper, he is a matter-of-fact poet; but Cowper's keener sense of humour saved him from the pitfalls into which Crabbe sometimes tumbled. Moreover, Cowper loved the scenery he described so accurately; Crabbe, with equal accuracy, is wanting in the love and enthusiasm which warmed the poet of 'The Task.' Crabbe did not die until 1832; but he must be numbered with Cowper among the poets of the last century; for, although his

'Borough' appeared in 1810, twenty-seven years after the publication of 'The Village,' he had no share in the great poetical revolution which distinguished the earlier years of this century.

It was a wonderful period in our literature, and if it lacked some qualities of sterling value, it gave us much of which the eighteenth century was comparatively barren—splendour of imagination, a passionate force which imparted new life to language, an ardent love of nature that produced as profound an influence in poetry as Turner exercised in plastic art, a width and freedom of range that would have dismayed the correct poetasters who followed in the wake of Pope.

The great poets of the age lived in harmony with nature. Wordsworth, the greatest of them all, studied his art out of doors. "Nine-tenths of my verses," he said, "have been murmured in the open air." Scott's poetry, like his prose, carries with it the scent of the heather. No one ever enjoyed scenery more, and few have described it with greater accuracy and brightness of colour. Landor, too, loved nature devoutly, although in his art it is subordinate to character; and it was his habit, like Wordsworth, to compose in the fresh air. "I am

fortunate," he writes to Southey, "for I never compose a single verse within doors, except in bed sometimes. I do not know what the satirists would say if they knew that most of my verses spring from a gate-post or a mole-hill." Coleridge, when he wrote his loveliest poetry, was a country-liver; Shelley, who caught with unerring precision every aspect of nature, was a wanderer through the best portion of his brief life, and found his grave at last in the ocean that he loved so well; Keats, London born and bred, adored Nature as a lover worships his mistress, and sings of her as though he had been cradled on her bosom; and Byron found his chief joy and his noblest inspiration from intercourse with the mighty mother.

The spirit awakened by these illustrious men has been at work ever since, and the poets of our own day are remarkable beyond all, save the greatest poets that have preceded them, for a profound study of nature. It is not to men who are essentially rural poets that we must look for the best rural poetry; not to Clare, truthful as his descriptions are, so much as to Wordsworth; not to Barnes, though his 'Poems of Rural Life' display a freshness of thought and a fidelity of description worthy of high praise, so much as to Mrs. Browning and to

Tennyson.* A great master of the greatest of all arts, deals in the first place with human emotion, and to this his affection for nature must ever be subordinate. The beauty he sees around him suggests thoughts and gives a rich colouring to language; but to describe it can never be his highest object, any more than it is the single aim of the artist to be a superb colourist. Wordsworth never forgets man in his intercourse with nature, and, indeed, the exquisite charm of his most exquisite descriptions consists in the way in which he blends the deepest feelings of the heart with the sights and sounds and hues of nature. Always with him there is, to use his own words,—

> " ——Some happy tone
> Of meditation slipping in between
> The beauty coming and the beauty gone."

* " Merely as a descriptive writer," says an able American critic, "who is so delightful as Tennyson? He has the unerring first touch, which in a single line proves the artist: and it justly has been remarked that there is more true English landscape in many an isolated stanza of 'In Memoriam' than in the whole of 'The Seasons'—that vaunted descriptive poem of a former century. A paper has been written upon the Lincolnshire scenery depicted in his poems, and we might have others, just as well, upon his marine or Highland views. He is a born observer of physical nature, and whenever he applies an adjective to some object, or passingly alludes to some phenomenon which others have not noted, is almost infallibly correct."—'Victorian Poets,' by Edmund Clarence Stedman, p. 188. (Chatto and Windus.)

And even when in the ardour of his love he prefers the knowledge to be gained from natural objects to that derived from books, it is because it will best teach him about man, the highest study of the poet:

> "One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil, and of good,
> Than all the sages can."

It is scarcely needful to point out how the same feeling pervades the idyllic poetry of Mr. Tennyson. In some of those almost faultless poems which, like Wordsworth's 'Brothers,' may, in the best sense of the word, be called Pastorals—'The Gardener's Daughter,' 'The Miller's Daughter,' and 'The Brook,' for example—it is interesting to note how closely-linked is the human sympathy and the sympathy with nature, how the one love blends with and purifies the other. Can there be a more perfect rural picture than the following? Yet lovely as it is, as a simple description, its beauty is enhanced a thousandfold when we remember how this outward joy and serenity is in harmony with the exultant bliss of the lover on that bright May morning:

> "——The steer forgot to graze,
> And where the hedge-row cuts the pathway, stood,



Leaning his horns into the neighbour field,
And lowing to his fellows. From the woods
Came voices of the well-contented doves,
The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy,
But shook his song together as he neared
His happy home, the ground. To left and right,
The cuckoo told his name to all the hills;
The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm;
The redcap whistled, and the nightingale
Sang loud, as though he were the bird of day."

Both Wordsworth and Tennyson are able by a line, almost by a word, to transport the city-dweller into the open country, so that he hears the lowing of cattle, the music of birds and streams, scents the fragrance of flowers, and sees with the "inward eye" the forest glade and mountain valley. Indeed, so thoroughly have these poets, if the phrase may be allowed, taken possession of Nature, that a lover of her and of them finds himself continually haunted by their music, or using their words, as he wanders leisurely through the country.

If he see a row of pigeons deep in contemplation upon a cottage roof, he remembers how these birds have been described as "sunning their milky bosoms on the thatch;" in the solitude of forests he recalls Wordsworth's injunction to touch with gentle hand, "for there is a spirit in the woods;" the shrill

crowing of the cock, returned as it so often is from adjoining farmsteads, suggests the couplet:

> "On tiptoe reared he strains his clarion throat,
> Threatened by faintly answering farms remote."

A stream that moves quietly along, "glideth at his own sweet will;" wayside flowers, the daisy, the celandine, or the primrose, have each an appropriate line of commemoration which the sight of them brings back to the memory; and who is there that, while listening to the sounds heard upon a warm day of summer in a park-like English garden, has not echoed Mr. Tennyson's most musical couplet:

> "The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
> And murmuring of innumerable bees."

If Keats had lived out a full life, instead of gaining in early manhood "a grave among the eternal," it is probable that so dear a lover of nature would have enriched our poetical literature with rural imagery to as large an extent as Wordsworth or Tennyson. As it is, the small volume he has left behind him is full to overflowing of glorious poetry, and the fidelity of his descriptions is as remarkable as the richness of his imagination. Mrs. Browning had more leisure to complete her life's work, and in

ne respects the result is more satisfactory. She, e Keats, was a poet to the heart's core, and read e and politics and all great social questions in the ht of a noble imagination. Like Keats, too, she ew much of nature, and her country pictures are as thful and accurate as if, with Clare and Bloomfield, had formed the one aim of her genius to sing rustic life and rural pleasures.

The most fruitful period of Mrs. Browning's life s spent in Italy, and some of her noblest verse was spired by the land of her adoption; but in the lendid poem—splendid in spite of a thousand faults which contains her highest convictions upon Life d Art, the special beauty of English scenery, re-lled, perhaps, all the more vividly after a residence road, is described with exquisite felicity. Take e passage only, in which the tamer features of English landscape are flushed with the light of etry.

"I flattered all the beauteous country round,
As poets use: the skies, the clouds, the fields,
The happy violets hiding from the roads
The primroses run down to, carrying gold,—
The tangled hedge-rows, where the cows push out
Impatient horns and tolerant churning mouths
'Twixt dripping ash-boughs,—hedge-rows all alive
With birds, and gnats, and large white butterflies,
Which look as if the May-flower had caught life

And palpitated forth upon the wind,—
Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver mist,
Farms, granges, doubled up among the hills,
And cattle grazing in the watered vales,
And cottage-chimneys smoking from the woods,
And cottage-gardens smelling everywhere,
Confused with smell of orchards. 'See,' I said,
'And see! is God not with us on the earth?
And shall we put Him down by aught we do?
Who says there's nothing for the poor and vile
Save poverty and wickedness? behold!'
And ankle-deep in English grass I leaped,
And clapped my hands and called all very fair."

It is impossible, in treating, of necessity very briefly and imperfectly, a large topic like English Rural Poetry, to do more than hint at subjects which might fairly demand a volume for their consideration.* This much, perhaps, we have made clear, that the love of rural beauty and the knowledge of rural life have been most largely displayed by our poets within the present century, that it is not to the poets who have confined their attention to rural objects we must necessarily look for the finest examples of rural poetry, and that the artificial verse known under the name of Pastoral was the result of a false conception, which the poets of

* The author may be allowed to refer to a work of his own upon the subject, entitled, 'Evenings in Arcadia,' published about ten years since by Messrs. Moxon and Co.

this century have replaced by a true one. Goethe, in his 'Hermann and Dorothea,' had proved how possible it was for a great poet to write a great pastoral poem. Wordsworth in 'The Brothers,' already mentioned, in 'Michael,' in the 'Waggoner,' in the 'Old Cumberland Beggar,' and other poems of similar character, has also shown that pastorals may be written which shall be wholly free from "the childish prattlement," as Cowper termed it, of these compositions as produced by Shenstone, Cunningham, and other rhymesters. Mr. Tennyson, while maintaining an entirely original treatment, has followed in the same track, and so successfully, that it is probable he is better known to some readers as the author of the poems we have already mentioned, than as the poet of 'In Memoriam,' of 'Morte D'Arthur,' and of 'Œnone.'

We refrain from dwelling upon the rural poetry of other living poets; but did space permit, it would be interesting to point out how accurately and affectionately the simpler aspects of nature have been observed by Mr. Matthew Arnold (note particularly his 'Scholar Gipsy,' with its lovely glimpses of Oxford scenery); by Miss Jean Ingelow, whose charm as a versifier lies wholly in her idyllic pieces; by Mr. Austin, whose fine work 'The

Human Tragedy' abounds with felicitous rural touches; by Mr. William Davies, whose 'Shepherd's Garden' is full of sweetest flowers and scents, and of musical notes, fresh as from the happy throats of blackbird, nightingale, and thrush; and by other poets, who maintain more or less worthily the honour of English poetry.

Here, however, we must make a reservation. No one possessing a general acquaintance with the writings of contemporary poets, and especially of those who belong to a well-known school of poetry and have submitted to its trammels, will feel that special praise for the happy rendering of natural objects can be indiscriminately awarded. The work of some of our living poets in this field is often subtle and profound, but in many instances the reader will observe a want of spontaneity and simplicity. Nature is sometimes forced by curious art into the poet's verse instead of holding her place there, to quote Coleridge's significant phrase, "by grace divine." We find too often brilliant patches of colour but no harmony, and a strenuous attempt to turn Nature to poetical account, rather than that submission to her influences and that reverence for her teaching which have been felt by our greatest poets. Love is the sure cure of egotism, the deeper

and purer the love the fainter the thoughts of self. The writer who thinks in the first place of his work, and gives the second place to Nature, who holds himself her master instead of being her lover and her servant, may produce poetry that is artistic in construction and powerful in expression, but he will be wanting in one of the sweetest and most elevating influences of the poetical life.

"The English muse," says Emerson, "loves the farmyard, the lane, and market. She says with De Staël, 'I tramp in the mire with wooden shoes whenever they would force me into the clouds.'" The assertion is curiously one-sided: for the poets of this country—witness Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Shelley, and Wordsworth—are distinguished beyond all others of the modern world for splendour of imagination and for

> "Large thoughts, the mothers of large sympathies,
> And tolerant forbearance:"

but this elevation of spirit and breadth of sympathy only serve to make more dear to them the common ways of men, and what we in our ignorance are accustomed to call, the common objects of nature.



THE ENGLISH SONNET.

THE Sonnet, as our readers know, owes its birth-place to Italy and its earliest fame to the exquisite productions of Petrarch. Dante, Tasso, and indeed all the worthiest poets of that land, have composed sonnets of high, some of supreme, excellence; but so readily does the Italian language adapt itself to this form of poetical composition, that the wit, the courtier, and the lover became unfortunately as familiar with it as the poet; and in the sixteenth century the infection spread with such rapidity that, as Hallam has pointed out, it would demand the use of a library formed peculiarly for this purpose, as well as a vast expenditure of labour, to read the volumes which the Italians filled with their sonnets. For our purpose, at this time, there is only one point about the Italian sonnet that requires to be mentioned. In form it is what is generally known as legitimate, that is to say, the first eight lines, called the Octave, possess only two rhymes, and the

six concluding lines, called the Sestette, never possess more than three. We may add that the poets of Italy were in the habit of closing the second quatrain with a full stop, so that with the ninth line commenced a new turn of thought.*

The revival of intellectual activity in the sixteenth century, which produced such glorious fruit in this country, led, as was natural enough, to an ardent study of the best authors of Italy, and it is impossible to read the Elizabethan poets and dramatists without observing how profound was the influence exercised over them by the wealth of fancy and imagination, of romantic narrative and history, stored up in the rich granary of Italian literature. Shakespeare, the greatest and most original writer of that age or of any, lays the scenes of several of his plays on Italian soil, and derives the plots of them from Italian sources. For one he goes to Ariosto, for another to Boccaccio, for a third to Cinthio; and if we examine with this design the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Ben Jonson, of Massinger, of Webster, and of Ford, we

* For an interesting account of the Italian Sonnet the reader may be referred to 'The Sonnet: its origin, structure, and place in Poetry, with original translations from the Sonnets of Dante Petrarch,' &c., by Charles Tomlinson, F.R.S. (John Murray.)

shall be struck by their common partiality for the same fountain head. It is not wonderful, therefore, that our poets in their eager admiration of Italian literature, should have seized upon one of the most characteristic features of Italian poetry, and have transplanted the sonnet to their native land. They made it their own, however, in the process, gave to it greater elasticity, and produced in this shape such gems of English art, that it would be as reasonable to complain that English watches were not genuine, because the first watch was invented by a German, as that the sonnet does not form a genuine portion of English verse, because the first sonnets were written by Italians. No doubt this idea has been encouraged by Dr. Johnson's 'Dictionary' assertion, that the sonnet is not very suitable to the English language; but the worthlessness of the criticism is proved by the lexicographer's miserable estimate of Milton's majestic sonnets as deserving no particular comment, since "of the best it can only be said that they are not bad." It is a significant fact, and an ample refutation of Dr. Johnson's belief that the structure of the English language is unfavourable to this kind of composition, that from Spenser downwards it has been employed, with scarcely an exception, by our greatest poets,

and this not merely as a poetical exercise, but because in certain moods of feeling they found in it the fittest vehicle of expression.*

Assuredly this was the case with Shakespeare, whose sonnets, illegitimate, or as we prefer to call them, English in form, are marvels in their wealth of thought and felicity of language; with Milton, in whose hands "the thing became a trumpet;" with Wordsworth, who often felt it

> "—— sunshine to be bound
> Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;"

and with Mrs. Barrett Browning, whose noble song never rings more musically or touches deeper chords of feeling than when rounded by the fourteen lines which form the compass of the sonnet. It is a special advantage of this form of composition, that it necessitates the precision of language and the concentration of thought which are of priceless value in poetry. In the sonnet every word should have a meaning, every line add to the beauty of the whole; and the exquisite delicacy of the workmanship should not lessen, but should rather assist

* Readers who wish to follow the track of the Sonnet in this country during three centuries of our literature, may refer to a small volume edited by the writer of this volume, entitled 'English Sonnets. A Selection.' (Henry S. King & Co.)

in increasing the stability of the structure. A sonnet, brief though it be, is of infinite compass.* What depth of emotion, what graceful fancy, what majestic organ notes, what soft flute-like music, is it not capable of expressing? The amatory sonneteers of Italy become frequently monotonous by harping too long upon one string, but in England our poets have rarely fallen into this error, and the variety to be found in the English sonnet is one of its great charms.

The earliest of our sonnet writers—Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey—friends in life, as well as in the art they practised, acknowledged Petrarch as their master; and the latter, who has been termed "the English Petrarch," deserves attention for the harmony of his versification, as well as for his originality of thought. In avoiding the quirks and quibbles recommended by the example of the Italian poet, the unfortunate Surrey shows that he possessed good taste, as well as poetical feeling. Surrey was a mere boy when he was married to Lady Frances Vere; and the love that finds utterance in his verse is, doubtless, for the wife of his youth. He had, besides, a poetical mistress, the

* "Un Sonnet sans défauts," says Boileau, "vaut seul un long Poème."

Lady Geraldine, whose name is almost as familiar to English ears as that of Petrarch's Laura; but since Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald, the Geraldine of the poet, was a mere child at the time when Surrey, a married man, professed to be dying for her love, it is evident that the fair girl had no real place in his affections. It was like the pretty love-making of Prior 'To a child of Quality.' *

We may add, before dismissing Surrey, that if it be true, as has been suspected, that the deadly hate of King Henry VIII. was roused against him by his sonnet 'On Sardanapalus,' the might wielded by the sonnet writer was early and fatally appreciated. "Drenched in sloth and womanish delight, feeble of

* The opinion expressed in the text is not universally accepted by the critics. Mr. Hales, we believe, has questioned it, and Mr. Brewer writes:

"In Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Henry, Earl of Surrey, we have poets of ripe age and growing families devoured by the pangs of love, and devoting themselves to the celebration of the charms of a youthful mistress—their own woes, hopes, and despondency,—with all the imaginary ardour of young lovers not yet arrived at the age of discretion. To this day it is impossible to decide whether the fair Geraldine, in the case of the latter, was the object of a real or mythical attachment; and in the former, whether 'his love called Anna,' a word 'that changeth not, though it be turned and made in twain,' was a substantial incorporation of flesh and blood, or only an incorporeal quibble."

Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII., vol. iv., Introduction and Appendix, p. 240.

spirit, impatient of pain," and enervated by "filthy lusts that stained his regal heart"—these are some of the terms used with regard to the Assyrian monarch which Henry might fitly apply to himself.

Surrey was executed in 1547, Wyatt died of a fever in 1542; but the births of Sir Walter Raleigh in 1552, and of Sir Philip Sidney in 1554—men who added to the chivalric qualities which have made their names immortal, the gift of poesy—sustained the line of our sonneteers. Leigh Hunt points out, and the remark is noteworthy, that the "first three introducers of the sonnet in England, Sir Thomas Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey, and Sir Philip Sidney, were all knightly and accomplished men;" but it will be seen that he omits the name of Raleigh, who wrote one sonnet at least, that leaves upon the mind, as Mr. Hunt elsewhere acknowledges, the impression of triumphant force. The fame of these heroic men preserves their poetry, not their poetry their fame.* But no reader can

* As our "first good prose writer," a great literary interest attaches to the name of Sidney, whose 'Arcadia' and 'Defence of Poesie'—very different in point of style—place him in no mean rank as a master of the language. The popularity he once enjoyed was necessarily of a temporary kind, nor was his reputation always maintained, even by scholars. Thus the famous Prideaux, Dean of Norwich, who was born about the middle of the seventeenth century, sneers at the 'Arcadia,' while acknowledging that it "hath the luck to be in so high esteem among women and fooles, who

pass by with indifference Sir Walter Raleigh's bold and flattering judgment of the 'Faery Queene,' or Sidney's beautiful sonnet addressed 'To Sleep,' or that 'To the Moon,' remarkable for its fine opening:

> "With how sad steps, O Moon! thou climb'st the skies,
> How silently, and with how wan a face!"

"The best of Sidney's sonnets," said Elia, with somewhat of the generous exaggeration with which he was apt to write of the merits of our elder poets, "are among the very best of their sort;" and he adds that "the verse runs off swiftly and gallantly," and "might have been tuned to the trumpet." Here is one written upon obtaining a prize at a tournament, admirably characteristic of the writer's style:

> "Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance
> Guided so well that I obtained the prize,
> Both by the judgment of the English eyes
> And of some sent from the sweet enemy—France;
> Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance;
> Townsfolk my strength; a daintier judge applies
> His praise to sleight, which from good use doth rise;

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know not how better to bestow their time than in reading such-like foolish trash." And the Dean adds: "As for my part, I must confesse myselfe to be utterly ignorant on what account Sir Philip Sidny hath soe great repute among us, I knowing nothing of him that may in the least deserve it; only the world conceived great hopes of him, which, if he had lived perchance he would never have satisfyed, and bee er this as littlo remembred as other men." —'Letters of Humphrey Prideaux, to John Ellis, 1674–1722.' Edited by E. M. Thompson. Printed for the Camden Society, p. 20.

Some lucky wits impute it but to chance;
Others, because of both sides I do take
My blood from them who did excel in this,
Think Nature me a man of arms did make.
How far they shot awry! The true cause is,
Stella looked on; and from her heavenly face
Sent forth the beams which made so fair my race."

In point of time, Thomas Lodge is Sidney's successor in the line of sonnet writers. Some of his verses are exquisite and fill the ear with music. He can begin well, but he generally concludes tamely, and from an aerial height of song drops the reader precipitately into a bog of prose. The following sonnet, addressed to Phyllis, will illustrate our assertion:

"Fair art thou Phyllis; ay, so fair, sweet maid,
As nor the sun nor I have seen more fair;
For in thy cheeks sweet roses are embayed,
And gold more pure than gold doth gild thy hair.
Sweet bees have hived their honey on thy tongue,
And Hebe spiced her nectar with thy breath:
About thy neck do all the graces throng
And lay such baits as might entangle Death.
In such a breast what heart would not be thrall?
From such sweet arms who would not wish embraces?
At thy fair hands who wonders not at all
Wonder itself through ignorance embases.
Yet nathëless tho' wondrous gifts you call these
My faith is far more wonderful than all these."

Nothing can be sweeter than the first twelve lines, nothing can be feebler or less appropriate to a sonnet

than the concluding couplet with its detestable double rhymes.

Thomas Watson, Lodge's contemporary, has been absurdly praised by Steevens, the once famous editor of Shakespeare, and he has received, we think, too high praise recently from Mr. Arber, who ranks him above Sidney. His sonnets are marked by extravagant imagery and a laboured attempt at passion. In this respect they may be associated with the sonnets of Henry Constable, but the latter has more of melody and of imagination, and, occasionally, which cannot be said for Watson, produces a sonnet of rare beauty. The following has been termed by a sound critic the most exquisite of his sonnets for sweet colour and winning fancy.

"Pity refusing my poor Love to feed,
A beggar starved for want of help he lies,
And at your mouth, the door of beauty, cries—
That thence some alms of sweet grants may proceed.
But as he waiteth for some almës-deed
A cherry-tree before the door he spies—
O dear, quoth he, two cherries may suffice
Two only life may save in this my need.
But beggars can they nought but cherries eat?
Pardon my Love, he is a goddess' son,
And never feedeth but on dainty meat,
Else need he not to pine as he hath done,
For only the sweet fruit of this sweet tree
Can give food to my Love and life to me."

Constable was a Roman Catholic, and was banished for political intrigues by the Government of Elizabeth. An edition of 'Diana: the Praises of his Mistres in certaine sweete Sonnets' was published in 1597, and his "ambrosiac Muse" received the praises of Ben Jonson. These love sonnets although disfigured by conceits are not without melody and genuine feeling, and we cannot agree with the late Mr. Robert Bell that they are "infinitely inferior" to those of Surrey and Wyatt.

The "Spiritual Sonnets" with which Constable is credited are in our estimate well-nigh contemptible.* Those written by his contemporary, Barnaby Barnes (born about 1569), are of greater merit, and deserve recognition for profound devotional feeling. The 'Divine Century of Spiritual Sonnets' may be termed collects in verse. Contrition, adoration, gratitude, faith,—in short the highest Christian virtues are exhibited in these devout poems, in which the poet describes the inner life of a religious man, but the sentiment expressed in them is more to be commended than the poetry. A similar

* Critics make mistakes sometimes, and this judgment may be too severe. Mr. Minto, an excellent judge, writes of them generally as "beautiful," and of some of them as "particularly fine."—'Characteristics of English Poets,' p. 258.

criticism must be passed on the 'Sundry Sonnets of Christian Passions' (more than three hundred in number), written about the same period by Henry Lok, which have been of late reproduced by Mr. Grosart. The weary toil of reading these pious and monotonous effusions is, for the poetical student, labour well-nigh thrown away. Not a flash of genius lights up the gloomy pathway. The writer exhibits a command of language and an ease of versification remarkable for the period, but his dulness is invincible, binding him hand and foot and leaving him in ignorance of his fetters. There is doubtless sincerity in these poems, but we cannot detect in them the bird-like snatches of genuine song for which Lok's editor gives him credit.

Samuel Daniel, called by his contemporary Davison "the Prince of English Poets," was a true, although not a great poet, and the praise awarded to him by Coleridge is well deserved; but his fifty-seven sonnets addressed to Delia, with the exception of the exquisite invocation to Sleep, demand notice only for two merits, ease of versification, and perfect purity of thought. Michael Drayton, who was born a year later than Daniel, and long outlived him, is the most voluminous writer of poetry in the language, and has many

merits of no mean order. His 'Battle of Agincourt' has as much vigour and *élan* as any English war lyric; in his 'Barons' Wars' he shows himself a vigorous and often picturesque chronicler in verse; in his 'Nymphidia' he exhibits a delightful play of fancy; in his wonderful and well-nigh interminable poem 'Polyolbion' he wanders over England, as Charles Lamb has beautifully said, "with the fidelity of a herald, and the painful love of a son who has not left a rivulet so narrow that it may be stepped over without honourable mention, and has animated hills and streams with life and passion above the dreams of old mythology." Sir Walter Scott, in his 'Life of Dryden,' makes the extraordinary assertion that Drayton, though less known than Spenser, "possessed, perhaps, equal powers of poetry." No one who has wandered with Spenser through his Faery-land to the sound of exquisite music, seeing visions such as few poets have dreamed of, and none described with such prodigal felicity of language, and has then trudged painfully along the by-ways of England, although not without compensation for the toil, with the poet of the 'Polyolbion,' can compare the two for a moment. But Drayton has written sonnets; and, in spite of Leigh Hunt's assertion, that they are

destitute of poetry, we venture to think that one of them is so remarkable for imagery and tender feeling as to deserve a place among the loveliest poems of its class. Those of our readers who are familiar with the piece will be willing to read it once again; and to those who are not we may hint that they are unlikely to do it justice by a single perusal:

"Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part:
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart
That thus so cleanly I myself can free;
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies.
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
Now if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!"

But the greatest of all Shakespeare's poetical contemporaries and his predecessor in the art of sonnet-writing was the divine Spenser,—the poet's poet, as he has been truly called, whose 'Faery Queene,' notwithstanding its tedious allegory and its frequent archaisms, is the joy of all true lovers of poetry. One of the chief characteristics of Spenser's genius

is expansiveness. His free foot cannot be confined within a narrow territory. So fertile is his imagination, so lively his fancy, that unless he have an ample space over which to wander at will, and in contempt sometimes of the laws that bind other poets, he loses half his might. Spenser is a poetical liberal; precedent is nothing to him; he must do as seems good in his own eyes, or his song will be impotent to charm. Such a poet was not likely to submit readily to the seeming bondage of the sonnet. Wordsworth found in its brief space true solace and delight, and proved himself a master of the instrument upon which he played; but Spenser, although using to the full the license of the times, appears, even in his loose sonneteering, to be like a man who is cramped and fettered with unaccustomed garments.

These sonnets, eighty-eight in number, sing the cruelty and charms of his mistress in the conventional style so frequently adopted in that age. Her beauty is dissected in fantastical phraseology; her eyes, her teeth, her breath, her smile, her frown, are compared with lightning, with pearls, with the scent of flowers, with sunshine, with storms. The hardest steel wears in time, he says, but nothing can soften her hard heart; the lion disdains to devour the

lamb, but she, more savage wild, "taketh glory in her cruelness;" she is a new Pandora, sent to scourge mankind; she is an angler, catching weak hearts, and then killing them with cruel pride; she is like a panther, who allures other beasts with his beauty, and then preys upon them. At the same time, she is her lover's sovereign saint, the idol of his thoughts, born "of the brood of angels," the Fairest Fair, who contains within herself all the world's riches, and her bosom is—

> "The nest of Love, the lodging of Delight,
> The bower of Bliss, the paradise of Pleasure."

Spenser's biographers, like Shakespeare's, in the dearth of much actual knowledge, have searched the poet's sonnets for additional information. The pursuit is alluring, but dangerous. The highest or lowest truths of poetry may be uttered through a fictitious medium, and in the Elizabehan age the poet, following the fashion of the time, was ready to invent a love-passion and to create a mistress, in order to serve the purposes of his verse. Spenser, it would seem, courted his divinity at the mature age of forty, and one feels quite sure that at that age no man with any mettle in him could undergo in reality the agonies Spenser underwent in verse

for the sake of an obdurate mistress. It was the style of poetical phraseology current in that day, and Spenser made use of it, like others, without a feeling of its worthlessness such as we may harbour now. If these remarks were not generally true, it would speak ill for the morality of the sonnet-writers. Petrarch's Laura and Dante's Beatrice were married women. Sir Philip Sidney's love-sonnets were addressed to Lady Rich, and were published in her own and her husband's lifetime; and although Spenser's are as pure as the rest of his poetry, and were dedicated to a real woman, it is evident that the larger portion of them, written as they are in the artificial diction of the period, must be chiefly regarded as clever exercises in verse. His heart was not in them as it is in the incomparable 'Epithalamion,' one of the loveliest surely of all lovely poems, which he sang upon the eve of his marriage.

Drummond, of Hawthornden, a poet known chiefly by his sonnets, thought so meanly of Spenser's as to doubt whether they were really his productions. "They are so childish," he said, "that it were not well to give them so honourable a father." Drummond's early love was doomed to disappointment; but, like Spenser, he married in mature life, being

fascinated with his second mistress from the resemblance she bore to the first. Immeasurably inferior as he is to the great poet of the 'Faery Queene' in other respects, his superiority as a sonnet-writer is beyond question. His versification is mellifluous, his thoughts are rarely injured by conceits, and many of the poems possess a symmetry and finish, which make us forget while reading them that Drummond is divided from us by the wide gap of three centuries. Take but one specimen out of many of equal worth that might readily be selected:

"Look how the flower which lingeringly doth fade,
The morning's darling late, the summer's queen,
Spoiled of that juice which kept it fresh and green,
As high as it did raise, bows low the head:
Right so my life, contentments being dead,
Or in their contraries but only seen,
With swifter speed declines than erst it spread,
And blasted, scarce now shows what it hath been.
As doth the pilgrim therefore whom the night
Hastes darkly to imprison on his way,
Think on thy home, my soul, and think aright
Of what yet rests thee of life's wasting day;
Thy sun posts westward, passèd is thy morn,
And twice it is not given thee to be born."

One of the pleasantest among the many pleasant excursions that can be made from Edinburgh is a ramble through Hawthornden, and the biography of our Elizabethan poets contains few facts of more

interest than the visit paid by Ben Jonson to the Scotch poet in his lovely retreat, then, of course, far more retired from the haunts of men than it is now. The long journey from London was made on foot, and to this visit we are incidentally indebted for nearly all our knowledge of the dramatist, whom Drummond kept under his roof for some weeks, during which, Boswell-like, he jotted down his conversations.*

Drummond's sonnets were published in 1616, Shakespeare's in 1609, and it will be seen, therefore, that in this hasty glance at a few of the Elizabethan poets, we have not kept strictly to chronological order. It is, however, better, perhaps, to dismiss the smaller sonnet-writers before referring to Shakespeare's wonderful productions in this department of poetry. They open a wide and difficult discussion which has bewildered some of our greatest writers, and called forth some of the most grotesque opinions ever uttered on a matter of literary criti-

* One differs unwillingly from a critic so distinguished as M. Taine, but when he calls Drummond "a vigorous and malicious pedant who has marred Ben Jonson's ideas and vilified his character," we are bound to say that in our opinion this harsh judgment cannot be sustained by an impartial estimate of the *Notes*. It should be remembered, too, that Drummond had no hand in the publication.

cism. It has exercised the infinite ingenuity of commentators without any satisfactory result, and it has led to unfavourable inferences with regard to the poet's personal character.* A German critic regards Shakespeare's sonnets as allegorical; one recent writer treats them as a burlesque upon "mistress sonnetting;" another holds that the two lovers of Sonnet CXLIV. are the Celibate Church and the Reformed Church; and another, an American, propounds a still stranger theory. These sonnets, he asserts, are hermetic writings, and the passion uttered in them is expressed for the Divine Being. "Beauty's Rose," mentioned in the first sonnet, is the spirit of humanity, and the "master-mistress" of the poet's passion addressed in the twentieth, means simply the writer's inward nature, as influenced by the reason and the affections which are alluded to elsewhere under the figure of his mistress's eyes. The word love, we are told, as used in the sonnets must in the main be understood as religious love; and in fact the poems are mystical throughout, having one meaning for the eye and another for the heart. The

* The difficulty that besets the reader of our early sonnets is to ascertain how much in them is conventional, how much due to genuine emotion. "Would it not be rash," asks George Eliot, "to conclude that there was no passion behind those sonnets to Delia which strike us as the thin music of a mandolin?"

climax of folly is perhaps reached in the following passage. "In Sonnet CLIII., *Cupid* signifies love in a religious sense; the *Maid of Dian* is a *virgin* truth of nature; the *cold valley-fountain* is the letter of the law, called a cool well in Sonnet CLIV.: and truth, we all know, is said to be at the bottom of a well."

Readers who prefer taking a less exalted view of these extraordinary productions will find much to interest them in Mr. Gerald Massey's elaborate and ingenious essay, 'The Secret Drama of Shakespeare's Sonnets unfolded,'—the most exhaustive work on the subject that has been, or is likely to be, written. It will suffice to mention here the gist of Mr. Massey's argument. He maintains that the greater number of the sonnets are dramatic and not personal, that some were written for the Earl of Southampton, some for Elizabeth Vernon, some for Lord Herbert, and that the passionate feeling expressed in them is the utterance of the dramatist Shakespeare rather than of the man Shakespeare. If this theory be correct it does not as the writer supposes remove the apparent stigma that attaches to Shakespeare as the author. "The true personal application of the latter sonnets," he observes, "is not that Shakespeare was gloomy and guilty enough to write them for himself, but that he had the exuberant jollity, the lax gaiety to write

them for the young gallant, Herbert." But the man who in a storm of passion utters what he is feeling is surely less blameworthy than the man who sits down in cold blood to simulate such passion for his friend. Mr. Massey seems to have some suspicion of this truth, for in one place alluding to the publication of the sonnets he writes:—"Shakespeare, I imagine, must have felt some dislike to the Herbert series being included, for he could not but have seen that however read, they did not reflect any credit on himself."

Mr. Massey's interpretation therefore, while throwing the light of day on some points hitherto obscure, does not, with all its ingenuity, remove the chief difficulty out of the reader's path. Moreover, Mr. Massey's argument forces him to place the sonnets in new combinations, and although considerable ability is shown in the readjustment, it is in the highest degree unlikely that by these violent changes, made to fit a theory, the sonnets have been shaken into their natural order. His views, however, have proved acceptable to some critics, and Herr Krauss, in a recent translation of what he calls 'Shakespeare's Southampton-Sonette,' accepts Mr. Massey's theory, and follows the order laid down in his volume. "Mir ist," he writes, "durch Massey's Auslegung

erst die rechte Freude an den Sonetten aufgegangen und da sie auch für meinen Zweck die allein befriedigende Grundlage bildet, nehme ich sie ohne Rückhalt an." We may observe here that while Mr. Massey holds the present order of the sonnets to be the result of haphazard, Mr. Simpson, in his 'Philosophy of Shakespeare's Sonnets,' affirms that if these poems "are examined in the light of the common sonnet philosophy—of that poetical Platonism which had inspired compositions of this kind ever since their rise,—their sequence is quite natural." "Indeed," he adds, "examined in this light they appear to be arranged with rare subtlety and care."

As a poet the sonnets enhance the fame even of Shakespeare; do they lower the estimate we might otherwise form of his moral character? This is the question which Mr. Massey's ponderous volume leaves unanswered. Hallam's opinion was so unfavourable to Shakespeare in this respect that he even expressed a wish the sonnets had never been written, a desire in which few will participate, for while there are passages which show, as Hallam justly observes, an "excessive and misplaced affection," the tone generally of this long series of poems is felt to be very noble. And may not the difficulty which

besets the student of Shakespeare be lessened, his faith in the noble spirit of the great master sustained, by the belief, a reasonable belief under the circumstances, that the larger portion of what is repellent in these poems, is due to what Mr. Minto terms the "supreme and perhaps fantastic generosity of friendship" which marks the Elizabethan age? Be this as it may, and the question will always be an obscure one, the richness of thought, the enchanting felicity of language which distinguish the best sonnets of the series, make them worthy of the writer. Hallam thinks they do not please at first, and Archbishop Trench has said finely: "Shakespeare's sonnets are so heavily laden with meaning, so double-shotted, if one may so speak, with thought, so penetrated and pervaded with a repressed passion, that, packed as all this is into narrowest limits, it sometimes imparts no little obscurity to them." It follows that the careless reader will gain little pleasure from these poems, and that their fulness of beauty cannot be appreciated until they have been read and re-read, or better still, committed to memory.

We do not intend to select even one sonnet for quotation out of the hundred and fifty-four which Shakespeare has left us. The choicest of them are, or ought to be, familiar; but if any reader

is still unacquainted with this golden treasury of thought and imagination, we counsel him to obtain a pocket edition of the poems, and carry it about with him until he gain a familiarity with its contents. At the same time, out of many of almost equal worth, we may recommend for his special study the sonnets commencing with the following lines:

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead.

From you have I been absent in the Spring.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments.

If thou survive thy well-contented day.

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore.

Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing.

Oh how much more doth beauty beauteous seem.

Shakespeare's sonnets consist invariably of three quatrains and a couplet, and it is perhaps to be regretted that he should have given the sanction of his great name to the least artistic form in which the sonnet can be written. It seems strange that the familiarity with Italian literature, which is a feature of that age, should not have led our

Elizabethan poets to follow the Italian model.* Spenser tried some infelicitous experiments with the sonnet, but he avoided or only partially followed the Italian form; so did Sir W. Raleigh; so did Daniel; the greater number of Drummond's sonnets are less irregular and so also are those of Donne, a poet whose memory has been affectionately preserved by Izaak Walton, and whose poetry, now

* "Surrey did not adhere to the strict fashion of Petrarch: his sonnets consist either of three regular quatrains concluded with a couplet, or else of twelve lines rhyming alternately and concluded with a couplet. Wyatt attempts to follow the order and interlacement of the Italian rhymes more closely, but he too always concludes his sonnets with a couplet. This introduction of the final couplet was a violation of the Italian rule which may be fairly considered as prejudicial to the harmony of the whole structure, and which has insensibly caused the English sonnet to terminate in an epigram. . . . Shakespeare adhered to the simple form introduced by Surrey; his sonnets invariably consist of three separate quatrains followed by a couplet. But Sir Philip Sidney, whose familiarity with Italian literature was intimate, and who had resided long in Italy, perceived that without a greater complexity and interweaving of rhymes the beauty of the sonnet was considerably impaired. He therefore combined the rhymes of the two quatrains as the Italians had done, leaving himself free to follow the Italian fashion in the conclusion of the sonnet, or else to wind up after English usage with a couplet. Spenser and Drummond follow the rule of Sidney; Drayton, that of Surrey and Shakespeare. It was not until Milton, that an English poet preserved the form of the Italian sonnet in its strictness; but after Milton, the greatest sonnet-writers—Wordsworth, Keats, and Rossetti—have aimed at producing sonnets at least as regular as those of Petrarch."—See 'The Debt of English to Italian Literature,' by J. A. Symonds. 'Fortnightly Review,' March, 1875.

well-nigh dead, might have had a chance of longer life had it been less quaint and fantastical.

The student of the Sonnet may pass at once, without missing anything in the transit, from Shakespeare to Milton, that is to say, from the year 1609 to the year 1631, when the Puritan poet produced his first sonnet, or rather to 1645, when he collected his early poems for the press. Milton's English sonnets (he wrote several in Italian which have been warmly praised by Italian, critics) are eighteen in number, and were composed at different periods of his life. It is remarkable that his love sonnets are written in Italian, and that not one of his English sonnets touches on this theme. It is remarkable also that in every instance, or nearly so, Milton has maintained the Petrarchian form, and that only on one occasion, namely, in the sonnet addressed to Cromwell, has he concluded the poem with a couplet:

> "Help us to save free conscience from the paw
> Of hireling wolves whose Gospel is their maw."

Milton had an exquisite ear, and proved himself in the 'Paradise Lost' the most accomplished master of harmony this country has produced. His sonnets, while conspicuous for majesty of thought, are lacking



in the delicate felicities of language so dear generally to the sonneteer. They have the dignity and chastity of sculpture, the calm and serene art which is most fitly expressed in marble or in bronze. Some of them are of profound interest as uttering in severely simple language the feelings of his heart, some of them are manly utterances of his political faith, not one perhaps but has a distinct value in the history of his life. So far from being unworthy of his mighty genius, as Johnson thought when he told Hannah More that Milton "could cut a Colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones," these short poems are gems of almost priceless value, as all must own, to whom the sonnet written 'When the assault was intended to the city,' that 'On the late Massacre in Piedmont,' termed by Savage Landor the sublimest of psalms; that 'On his blindness,' that 'To Mr. Lawrence,' the two addressed 'To Cyriack Skinner,' and the beautiful sonnet 'On his deceased wife,'—are familiar as household words. "Soul-animating strains," says Wordsworth, and in these words describes their character with the utmost precision.

In this brief survey of a large subject it will be advisable, taking the leap of a century, to pass from Milton to Gray, for we are not aware of any sonnet

worthy of mention having been produced between 1645 and 1742, when the death of Richard West called forth from his poet-friend a sonnet of rare beauty. That century, nevertheless, was not barren in poetical fruit. However greatly we may prefer the wealth of thought and imagination which comes to us from the Elizabethan poets, from Milton, and from the poets who made so illustrious the early part of our own century, we must not forget the debt we owe to the Queen Anne men, and especially to Pope, who, despite his faults, and they are many, was a consummate literary artist, a wit of the finest order, a poet possessing an exquisite fancy and a force of expression which stamp all that he has written with the mark of genius. Pope's taste and culture never led him to try his hand on the sonnet, and we think we are correct in saying that neither Addison nor Gay, Prior nor Parnell, Swift, Thomson or Young, ever attempted this form of poetical composition. With the exception of Thomson, these writers were poets of the town and of society; but our English sonnet has been generally the growth of quiet thought and of an imagination fostered under the eye of nature. But to return to Gray. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge have found fault with the one sonnet he wrote, on the ground that the

diction is artificial, and the images incongruous. Gray was a purist in language. His fastidiousness indeed was sometimes carried to an extreme, but Gray never threw off entirely the conventional phraseology which was at one time regarded as the language of poetry. His odes, for example, abound in terms which a third-rate poet of our day would reject as turgid or artificial; for Gray, although a true poet, was not great enough to cast aside the fetters he knew how to wear so gracefully. Leigh Hunt, whose taste in the more delicate questions of poetical controversy can rarely be questioned, has defended Gray's single sonnet with considerable ability; let us first read the poem and then listen to his comments:

"In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire:
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire:
These ears, alas! for other notes repine,
A different object do these eyes require:
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men:
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear:
To warm their little loves the birds complain:
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
And weep the more because I weep in vain."



The feeling of this sonnet, as a whole, strikes us as exquisite; but the allusion to Phœbus in the second line may grate upon modern ears. Hear then what Hunt has to say in its favour. He defends it on the same ground that he would defend the 'Lycidas' of Milton, and avers that men so imbued with the classics can speak from their hearts in such language. "Perhaps," he says, "had they not both so written they had not spoken so well. They would not have used language so accordant with the habits of their intercourse." And he adds, "The image in Gray's sonnet is beautiful for its own sake, and beautifully put:

> "In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
> And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire."

"We are too much in the habit of losing a living notion of the sun; and a little Paganism, like this, helps, or ought to help, to remind us of it. . . . 'Phœbus,' in this instance, is not a word out of the dictionaries, but a living celestial presence."

Thomas Warton, of whom we have written more largely elsewhere (see p. 192), a man of considerable culture, a wit, a college don, and favourably known as an imitative poet, who had studied chiefly in the school of Milton, was Gray's friend and contem-

porary, and a friend also of poor Collins, whose work, accomplished in a short and unhappy life, is very exquisite and precious. Warton is best known by his prose works, but some of his short descriptive poems are in a measure excellent, and he wrote nine sonnets, of which two, although not to be ranked with the best, deserve at least honourable mention. We allude to the sonnet 'Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon,' and to that addressed to the river Loddon, which is gracefully and tenderly written.

Contemporary with Warton was a poet of a far higher order, much of whose work is destined to live, because based upon the eternal truths of nature. William Cowper may be said to have commenced the poetical revolution, which more thoroughly, and on a far wider scale, was accomplished by Wordsworth. Verse is not the fitting vehicle for theology, and Cowper, as a theologian, frequently loses his cunning; but in his expression of religious feeling apart from dogma, and in his loving, careful description of nature and of the feelings called forth by natural objects, he takes a distinguished place among the poets. Truly does Southey say of 'The Task,' that "the descriptive parts everywhere bore evidence of a thoughtful

mind and a gentle spirit, as well as of an observant eye, and the moral sentiment which pervaded them gave a charm in which descriptive poetry is often found wanting." Cowper, one of the most sorrowful of men, is also one of the most pathetic of poets, and this pathetic charm will be felt in the beautiful sonnet addressed to Mrs. Unwin:

"Mary! I want a lyre with other strings,
Such aid from Heaven as some have feigned they drew,
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things,
That ere through age or woe I shed my wings,
I may record thy worth with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,
And that immortalizes whom it sings:—
But thou hast little need. There is a Book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look,
A chronicle of actions just and bright—
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine
And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine."

At the end of the last century two women, Charlotte Smith and Anna Seward, wrote a great number of sonnets which gained a temporary popularity. Charlotte Smith's are simple and unaffected; Miss Seward, who attained much local reputation, will be remembered from her friendship, if, indeed, friendship is the correct term to use, with Sir

Walter Scott. The poet visited her at Lichfield, corresponded with her, and liked her far better than her writings. Unhappily the lady's estimate of her poetry differed from Scott's, and when she died, in 1809, she bequeathed her posthumous verses to him, with injunctions to publish them speedily, and to give a sketch of her life. Scott felt bound by the lady's wishes, and issued three volumes of what he is forced in his correspondence to call "execrable poetry." It frequently happened that Scott's kindliness of heart got the better of his critical judgment, and in this case he was severely punished for his good nature. "He had been," says Lockhart, "as was natural, pleased and flattered by the attentions of the Lichfield poetess in the days of his early aspirations after literary distinction; but her verses which he had with his usual readiness praised to herself beyond their worth, appeared, when collected, a formidable monument of mediocrity."

From a mass of rubbish it would be possible to rescue one or two sonnets that are of sound quality. The poem commencing with the line—

"I love to rise ere gleams the tardy light,"

has some merit, but the merit is not conspicuous; and a tolerable sonnet, as Archbishop Trench has

justly observed, is "the most intolerable thing of all."

There are some sonnets that possess a literary, rather than a poetical interest. Thus, for example, Miss Williams' sonnet 'To Hope' scarcely advances beyond the rank of respectable mediocrity, but it is noteworthy as having been liked by Wordsworth and retained for many years in his memory. The sonnets of Bowles, too, many of them excellent specimens of mellifluous versification, are chiefly to be remembered as having awakened the poetical life in Coleridge, whose poetry, small in compass, ranks with the most purely poetical that has been produced this century. As a sonnet-writer, Coleridge (differing herein from his son Hartley) may be said comparatively to have failed. The amazing genius of "the Highgate sage" was obscured and partly rendered inoperative by his fatal irresolution. "'I will begin to-morrow,'" he says, "and thus he has been all his life long letting to-day slip."* The same curse beset the gifted Hartley, who has left little to testify to his uncommon powers. His best and most characteristic poems are sonnets, and among them are a few of high, if not of supreme, excellence. The passionate feeling which prompted

* Southey.

several of these pieces is accompanied by a consummate mastery of form. The following sonnet, descriptive of a life that he deemed wasted, is deeply pathetic:

"Long time a child, and still a child, when years
Had painted manhood on my cheek, was I;
For yet I lived like one not born to die:
A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears,
No hope I needed, and I knew no fears.
But sleep, though sweet, is only sleep; and waking
I waked to sleep no more; at once o'ertaking
The vanguard of my age, with all arrears
Of duty on my back. Nor child, nor man,
Nor youth, nor sage, I find my head is grey,
For I have lost the race I never ran—
A rathe December blights my lagging May;
And still I am a child, though I be old:
Time is my debtor for my years untold."

S. T. Coleridge, by the way, declared that the foreigner Blanco White had written the "finest and most grandly conceived sonnet in our language," adding, "at least, it is only in Milton and in Wordsworth that I remember any rival." The execution, unfortunately, is not equal to the conception; but, notwithstanding some trivial defects, it is a noble poem, and justifies, or nearly so, this high eulogy:

TO NIGHT.

"Mysterious Night! when our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,

Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
This glorious canopy of light and blue?
Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And lo! creation widened in man's view.
Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
Within thy beams, O Sun; or who could find,
Whilst fly, and leaf, and insect stood revealed,
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind!
Why do we then shun death with anxious strife?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?" *

The names of Blanco White and of Coleridge remind us that our rapid course has brought us within sight of the affluent and wide-spreading river of poetry that flowed at the beginning of this century. The little rivulet of the sonnet which we have lately followed, swells again, as in the sixteenth

* The following admirable and exhaustive criticism of this sonnet, which we copy from the 'Spectator' (Dec. 20, 1873), corroborates the view expressed by Coleridge:

"The exquisite art of that sonnet of Mr. Blanco White's, seems to us to exhibit as in a perfect type, the true rationale of the sonnet. It is not abstract, for it is penetrated throughout with the most vivid sense of vision; it is not merely or chiefly pictorial, for its whole life and meaning are intellectual, an appeal to the highest and subtlest kind of analogy; it is not didactic, for it throbs with the keenest of human feelings, the profound mystery of Death mingled with the instinct of immortality; it is not stagnant—the worst danger of the sonnet—but full of motion, every line advancing you towards the conclusion . . . and it does contrive, as but few sonnets do, to combine the vivid flash of a surprise with the stately movement of an intellectual train of thought."

century, into a broad stream; and standing upon its banks, and seeing the wealth it bears, one feels how impossible it is to do more than note a few of the choice treasures that attract the eye. The two most popular poets, sixty years ago, were Scott and Byron. The former has no claim upon our attention as a sonnet-writer; but Byron, whose genius, like that of Scott, generally needed a wider scope and a form of composition less exact, produced a few fairly good sonnets, and one 'On the Castle of Chillon" as lofty in thought as it is happy in expression. Justly does Mr. Swinburne characterise it as "one of his noblest and completest poems." Nor should we look for much workmanship of this kind from a singer like Shelley, whose passionate emotion, uttered in many a winding bout of linked sweetness, could scarcely find free utterance on an instrument which demands reticence of language and stern compression of thought. One grand sonnet, however, has been produced by Shelley, which fills the imagination as only the work of a great master can:

> "I met a traveller from an antique land,
> Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
> Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
> Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown

And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:—
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty! and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away!"

Young as Keats was when he "awakened from the dream of life," he gave evidence in his last years of a maturity of thought, and a power of execution which prove that had he lived he would have exhibited the calm strength and the elevation of purpose which give dignity to poetry as well as to life. No poet ever grew more rapidly than Keats, and the two years (1818-20) that elapsed between his first publication and his last, produced poems that can die only with the language. The luxuriant freedom of 'Endymion' did not augur success to this poet as a sonnet-writer, but strange to say, and yet not strange, for genius works by no rule that we can estimate, the greatest sonnet produced by Keats —a sonnet which deserves to rank among the best in the language—was written in the first blush of his poetic life. He wrote several fine sonnets later on,

but not one possessing superior merit to that composed 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer.'

"Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been,
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or, like stout Cortes, when with eagle eyes,
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

But the greatest of English sonnet-writers is Wordsworth. Not only has he composed a larger number of sonnets than any other of our poets, he has also written more that are of first-rate excellence. There is no intensity of passion in Wordsworth's sonnets; and herein he differs from Shakespeare and from Mrs. Browning; neither has he attained the severe dignity of style which marks the sonnets of Milton; but for purity of language, for variety and strength of thought, for the exquisite skill with which the emotions of the mind are associated with the aspects of nature, and despite his poetical theory, for

wealth of poetical diction, we know of no sonnet-writer who can take precedence of Wordsworth when this poet is in his highest mood. In his larger poems his language is sometimes slovenly, and occasionally, as Scott said, he chooses to crawl on all-fours; but this is rarely the case in the sonnets, and though he wrote upwards of four hundred, there are few, save those on the 'Punishment of Death,' and some of those called 'Ecclesiastical' (for neither argument nor dogma find a fitting place in verse), that we could willingly part with.

To write of them here as they deserve is obviously impossible, and happily the task has been so ably done already by Sir Henry Taylor—himself a great poet, whose dramas will, we think, be even more appreciated in future years than they are now—that a few brief remarks may suffice. Wordsworth's belief that the language of the common people may be used as the language of poetry, was generally inoperative when he composed a sonnet.* He wrote at such times in the best diction he could command,

* But not always, for a few of his sonnets are as barren of poetical diction, and we must add of poetical thought, as the weakest lines of Walt Whitman—witness the poem commencing with the line:

"We had a female passenger, who came."



and the language, like the thought, is that of a great master. His theory was altogether set at nought in his finest works, and there is no trace of it in the ode on 'Intimations of Immortality,' 'Tintern Abbey,' 'Laodamia,' the 'Ode to Duty,' or in many other of the glorious poems to which he owes his fame. Much of that fame is due to the sonnets, which embrace almost every theme, except the one to which this branch of the poetical art has been usually dedicated. The passion of love has no place in the sonnets of Wordsworth, but some of the noblest are dedicated to liberty; some describe with incomparable felicity the personal feelings of the writer; some express with a more perfect instrumentation than any other poet has attained, the connection between the external world and the human soul; some might be termed simply descriptive, were it not that even these are raised above the rank of descriptive poetry, by the pure and lofty imagination of the poet. The light that never was on sea or land illuminates these poems, and throughout them there is inculcated a cheerful, because divine, philosophy. When Wordsworth writes mournfully, it is from no fanciful melancholy such as that in which Byron-imitators used at one time to indulge, but because he fears lest the eager

toil after wealth should deprive us of the simple pleasures, the serene happiness, which belong to us by birthright:

> "The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"

In another sonnet he gives expression to a like feeling. After saying that our life is only dressed for show, he adds:

> ". . . . We must run glittering like a brook
> In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:
> The wealthiest man among us is the best:
> No grandeur now in nature or in book
> Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,
> This is idolatry; and these we adore:
> Plain living and high thinking are no more:
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
> And pure religion breathing household laws."

And in another sonnet he adjures his countrymen, who at that time were anticipating a French invasion, not to place too much reliance on the "barrier flood" which separated them from France:

> ". . . . Winds blow and waters roll
> Strength to the brave, and Power and Deity;
> Yet in themselves are nothing! One decree
> Spake laws to *them* and said that by the soul
> Only, the nations shall be great and free."

But if for a moment Wordsworth fears for England and feels for her "as a lover or a child," he acknowledges that such fears are "unfilial," since it is not to be thought of that this most famous Stream of British freedom should be lost in bogs and sands:

> ". . . . . In our halls is hung
> Armoury of the invincible knights of old;
> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung
> Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold."

Indeed, courage and cheerfulness are noticeable virtues in Wordsworth's poetry. His prevailing mood is one of steadfastness and hope—

> "A cheerful life is what the Muses love—
> A soaring spirit is their prime delight."

If we were asked by a reader, hitherto ignorant of this great poet, to select from the sonnets, almost all of which deserve careful and patient perusal, a few of pre-eminent beauty, or that are specially characteristic of his genius, we could but point him to those with which the admirers of Wordsworth are already perfectly familiar—the two sonnets on the 'Sonnet,' the first of the four on 'Personal Talk,' 'London from Westminster Bridge,' the sonnet addressed 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture,'

which towards its close breathes the highest poetical inspiration, the three 'To Sleep,' that 'On the Departure of Sir Walter Scott for Naples,' and several of those dedicated to 'Liberty.' We may add that the series on the 'River Duddon' are noteworthy specimens of this master; and that those who desire to appreciate Wordsworth's power, and to enjoy the intellectual wealth stored up in his poetry, must be willing to give time and labour to the study of his works. Writing of the poet when he was still living and singing, Sir Henry Taylor observed, and the words come with equal force still, "Mr. Wordsworth never intended so to write that those who run might read. To detain for a brief moment these runaway readers is the proper aim of those who are snatching at a transient popularity; and this writing for a cursory perusal has been the bane of literature in our times, and the ruin of art. But neither to this aim nor to this way of writing has Mr. Wordsworth ever lent himself."

Wordsworth is sometimes obscure from the weight and variety of his thoughts, but seldom from the lack of careful handling and artistic skill. He had generally a perfect command of his instrument; Mrs. Browning, on the contrary, exhibits more wealth of imagination and originality of thought, than skill in execution. She is a noble poet, but

not a consummate artist, and in the mechanical part of her art she is often faulty. In the sonnet, however, the necessity of a rigorous method was forced upon her, and some of her most remarkable poems are produced in this form. They may be divided perhaps, but not with any sharp line of demarcation, into two classes—religious sonnets and love sonnets. Among the former the highest place must be assigned to the three sonnets on St. Peter and to the four sonnets headed 'Bereavement,' 'Consolation,' 'Comfort,' and 'Cheerfulness taught by Reason.' The love sonnets, forty-three in number, and professing to be "from the Portuguese," abound in wealth of thought, in strength of passion, in subtle beauty of expression, in the high imagination which is the poet's prime possession. These are no "fancy pieces," but utter in impassioned language the innermost soul of the writer. No words of criticism can do justice to the poetical animation of these glorious poems; and it is with a feeling sad almost as that of a father whose daughter's beauty has been marred by some miserable accident, that we are forced, despite our wishes, to note even in this, her most perfect work, the strange flaws that occur now and again to interrupt the harmony of the tenderest and sincerest of all modern love-poetry.

On these flaws, however, we need not dwell, for

it is a thankless task to point out the tiny motes that obscure in some degree the white light, pure as a crystal sea, which illumines Mrs. Browning's verse. To quote from pages that are open to all readers and familiar to most, seems superfluous; but, on the other hand, illustration, if not always essential to criticism, relieves it of its monotony and gives to it a beauty none the less attractive because it is borrowed. We shall quote therefore two sonnets from the series, premising that this great poem "from the Portuguese," although divided into many portions, is but one in design and action.

"If thou must love me, let it be for nought,
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile—her look—her way
Of speaking gently—for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day.'—
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee—and love so wrought
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,—
A creature might forget to weep who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou may'st love on through love's eternity."

"If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,

When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove,
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me—wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove."

Hood's reputation as a humourist has well-nigh obscured his fame as a poet. Those most familiar with his serious poetry will have found in it something better than the highest imitative art, and will be of opinion that he has a secure, though not an elevated place amongst the splendid poets of his country. Some of his sonnets have a tenderness and pathos that are singularly winning. They prove how sensitive Hood was to beauty, and how exquisitely he could express the feelings welling up from a full heart, without losing the moderation and dignity of tone demanded of the sonnet-writer. Exaggeration, which is the life of humour, is destructive of all lofty rhyme; but sobriety is a marked feature of Hood's sonnets, and in one instance only does his enormous capacity for punning get the better of his poetical discretion.

A far less known poet is scarcely less worthy to

be known as a sonnet-writer; we allude to William Caldwell Roscoe, whose genius was dramatical as well as lyrical, witness his 'Violenzia,' a drama of high purpose and admirable execution, which deserves a larger recognition from the public than it appears yet to have received. Roscoe's sonnets were not published in the author's lifetime, and lacked therefore the advantage of his final revision. This will account for some slight defects of composition which detract from the charm of these delicately beautiful poems. The following sonnet addressed by the poet to his mother is marked by genuine feeling and by graceful execution:

"As winter in some mild autumnal days
Breathes such an air as youngest spring discloses,
So age in thee renews an infant's grace,
And clothes thy cheek in soft November roses:
Time hath made friends with Beauty in thy face,
And since the wheeling Fates must be obeyed,
White rime upon thy gracious head he lays,
But whispers gently not to be afraid;
And tenderly, like one that leads the blind,
He soothes thy lingering footsteps to the gate,
While that great Angel, who there keeps his state,
Smiles to behold with what slow feet he moves.
Move slower, gentlier yet, O Time! or find
A way to fix her here, bound by our filial loves."

Another recent singer, the Hon. Julian Fane, whose verse bears the signs of eloquence and culture,



and who, according to his biographer, the present Lord Lytton, was "the most graceful and accomplished gentleman of the generation he adorned," wrote a series of sonnets "Ad Matrem" year by year in commemoration of his beloved parent's birthday. The feeling expressed in these poems is admirable, and to a certain extent they exhibit mastery of form; but they echo Shakespeare too distinctly to deserve high praise except as imitative art, and we cannot agree with Lord Lytton's judgment, that in the range of modern poetry few happier examples of the sonnet exist than Julian Fane's.

Many other and worthy names crowd upon the memory as we approach the close of this retrospect. Arthur Hallam, who lives in "In Memoriam," wrote several sonnets of more than moderate excellence; still more notable were the achievements of Sir Aubrey de Vere, who in some cases approaches closely to the merit attained by his friend and model, Wordsworth. The Rydal poet indeed considered these sonnets to be the best of modern times, of course with the exception of his own. This is high praise, and hardly to be endorsed to its full extent by the impartial critic. There is little in them, as it seems to us, of high imagination or imperial fancy, but they are dignified in expression,

weighty in thought, and such as Sir Aubrey's son, himself a poet of larger growth, may justly regard with no common veneration.

What David Gray might have achieved as a poet, had his life been spared, it is impossible to conjecture; but we suspect, from his hysterical sensibility and unreasonable confidence in his own genius, that failure, or comparative failure, would have been written on his work. Lord Houghton, however, who befriended the young poet in the wisest manner when counsel and direction were the most needed, believed there was in him the making of a great man, and much deference must be paid to his judgment. The story of Gray's life, as told by his friend and brother-poet, Mr. Robert Buchanan, is one of the most affecting chapters in modern literature. It is painful to listen to the young poet's cry after life, as it was slipping from him, and to note his eager boy-like ambition to gain a name in poetry before death took him. The reality of his verse is its most striking feature; the inmost heart of the writer is uttered out in his sonnets, and the little volume that holds all that is left to us of "the hand-loom weaver's son," exhibits the early blossoms, if not the ripe fruit, of poetry. David Gray is one of our minor poets, and had he lived would pro-

bably have merited no higher title; but his work is genuine, and we do not despise the cowslip because it cannot boast the rich colours of the tulip. Another Scotchman over-much praised at the beginning of his career, and perhaps too greatly depreciated afterwards—we mean Alexander Smith—has some merit as a sonneteer; and the joyous faith expressed in the following poem affords a striking contrast to the despondency, very natural under the circumstances, uttered by poor Gray:

"Beauty still walketh on the earth and air,
Our present sunsets are as rich in gold
As ere the Iliad's music was out-rolled;
The roses of the Spring are ever fair,
'Mong branches green still ring-doves coo and pair,
And the deep sea still foams its music old.
So, if we are at all divinely souled,
This beauty will unloose our bonds of care.
'Tis pleasant when blue skies are o'er us bending,
Within old starry-gated Poesy
To meet a soul set to no worldly tune,
Like thine, sweet Friend! O dearer this to me
Than are the dewy trees, the sun, the moon,
Or noble music with a golden ending."

Here we must close this brief and imperfect account of our sonnet-writers. To include living names would demand another Essay of equal length to this, for the Sonnet is a favourite mode of composition with poets of our time, several of whom have

employed it with a joyous energy and a rhythmical sweetness that have rarely, if ever, been surpassed. Enough, however, has been said to show that for three centuries the Sonnet has held a place among the legitimate forms of English verse, and with what affection it has been regarded by the great poets of England. It will not indeed be appreciated by the "idle reader," who cares only for the amusement afforded by an "idle lay." All noble verse demands studious regard; but "the sonnet is a form of poetry in which style is put under high pressure," and the delight it affords is generally the reward of toil.

THE END.

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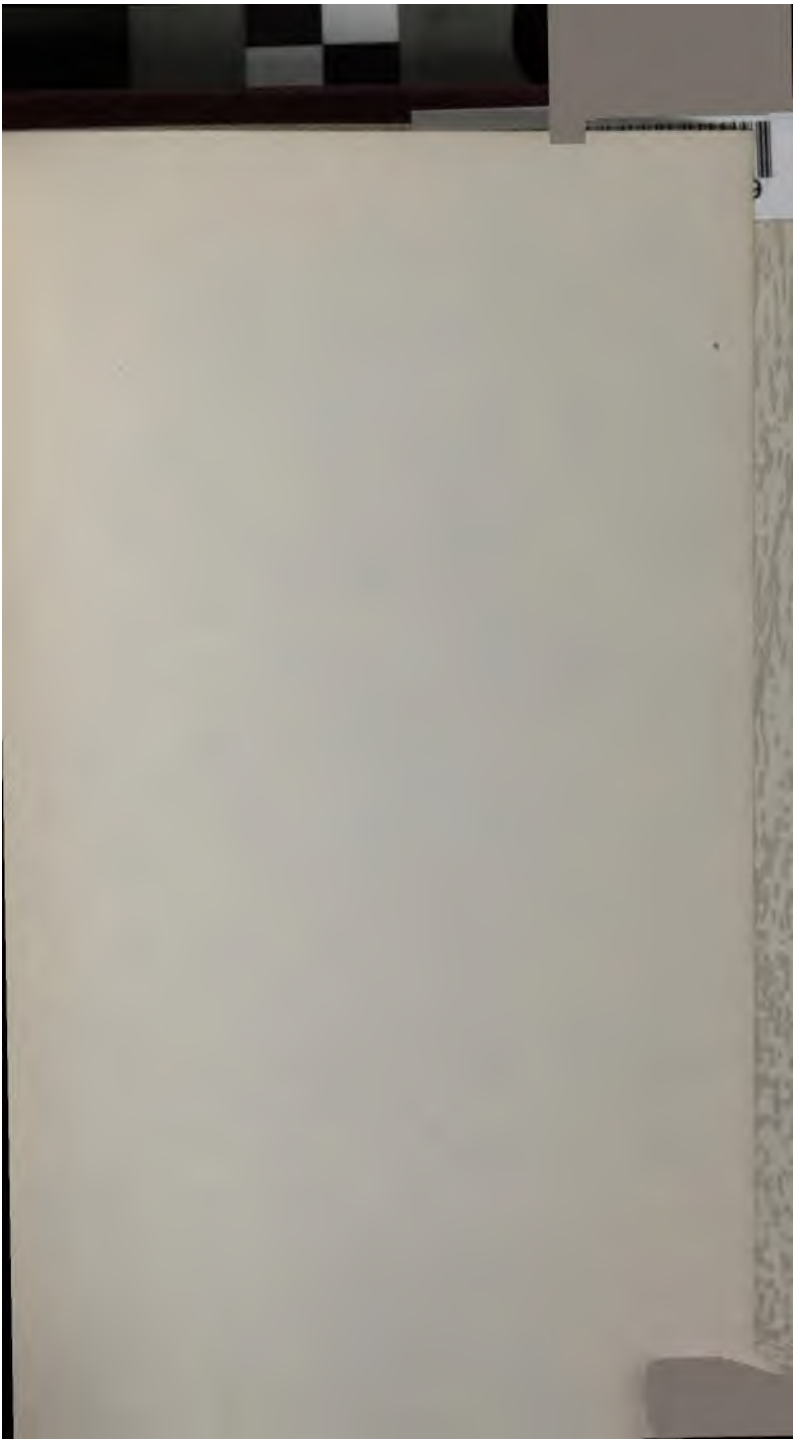
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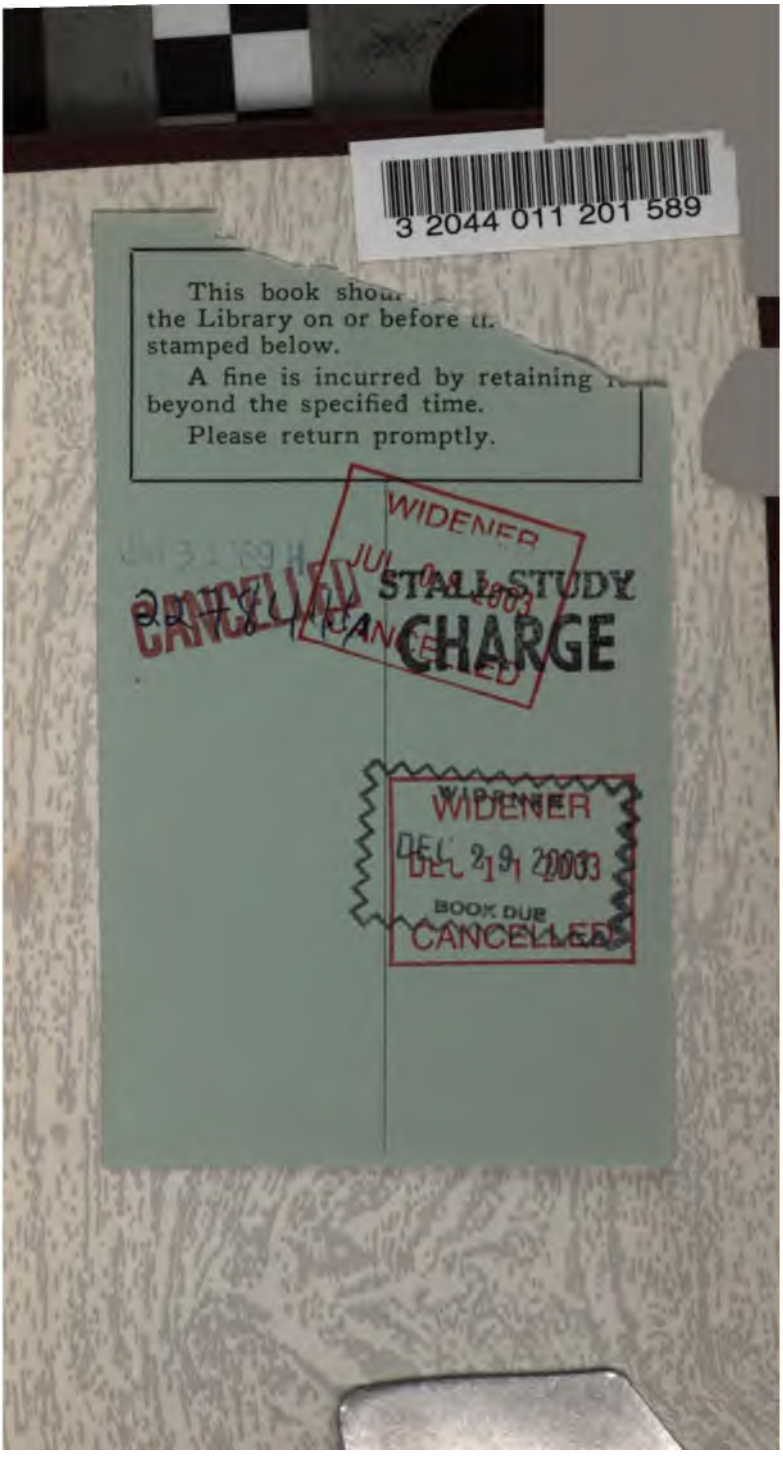
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